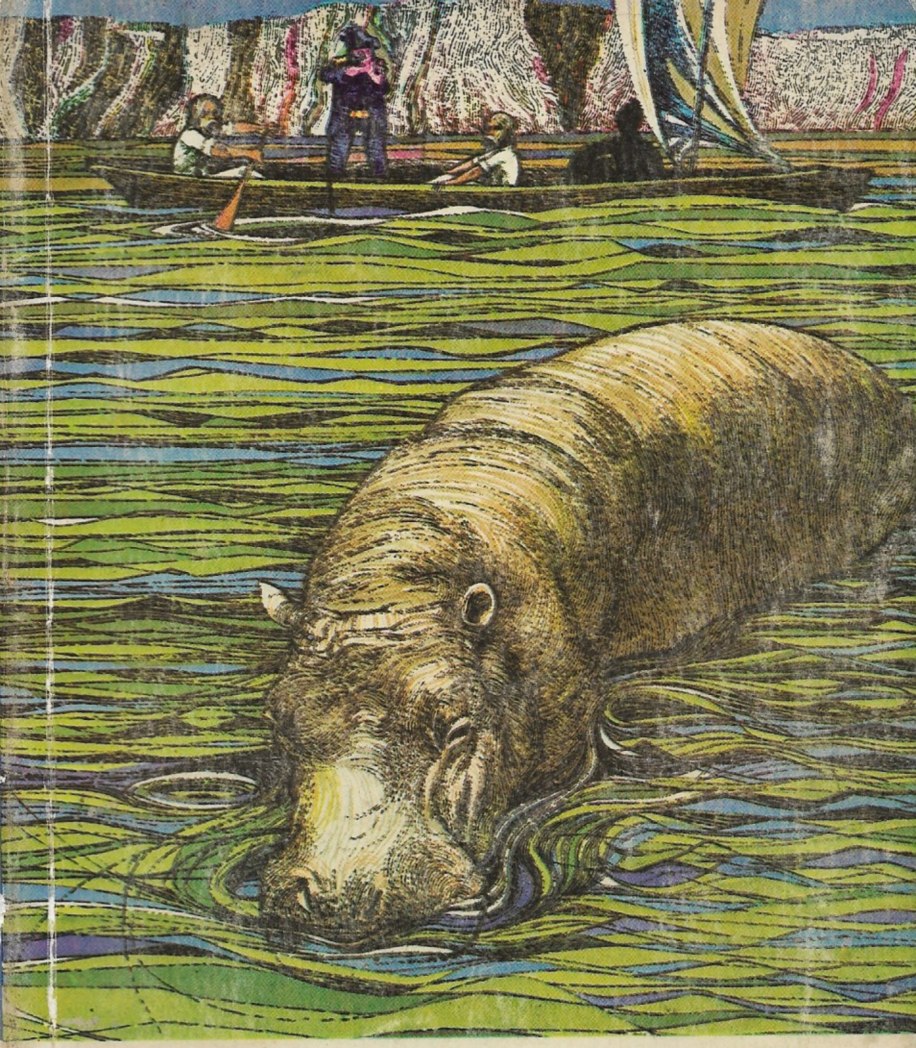

Allan Quatermain

SIR H. RIDER HAGGARD

NEW METHOD SUPPLEMENTARY READER STAGE 5

ALLAN QUATERMAIN

ALLAN QUATERMAIN

BY

SIR H. RIDER HAGGARD

Simplified and brought within the vocabulary of New Method Reader 5 by

MICHAEL WEST

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Illustrated by
Paddy Wells

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BLEDLOW HOUSE
BLEDLOW

Dec. 20. 1891.

The following papers were posted to me from France by a gentleman named Alphonse Durand, together with a note from my brother Henry, asking me to make them known. I have, therefore, hastened to give this almost unbelievable (and yet true) history to the public so that the real facts of the disappearance of my brother and his companions may be known.

George Curtis

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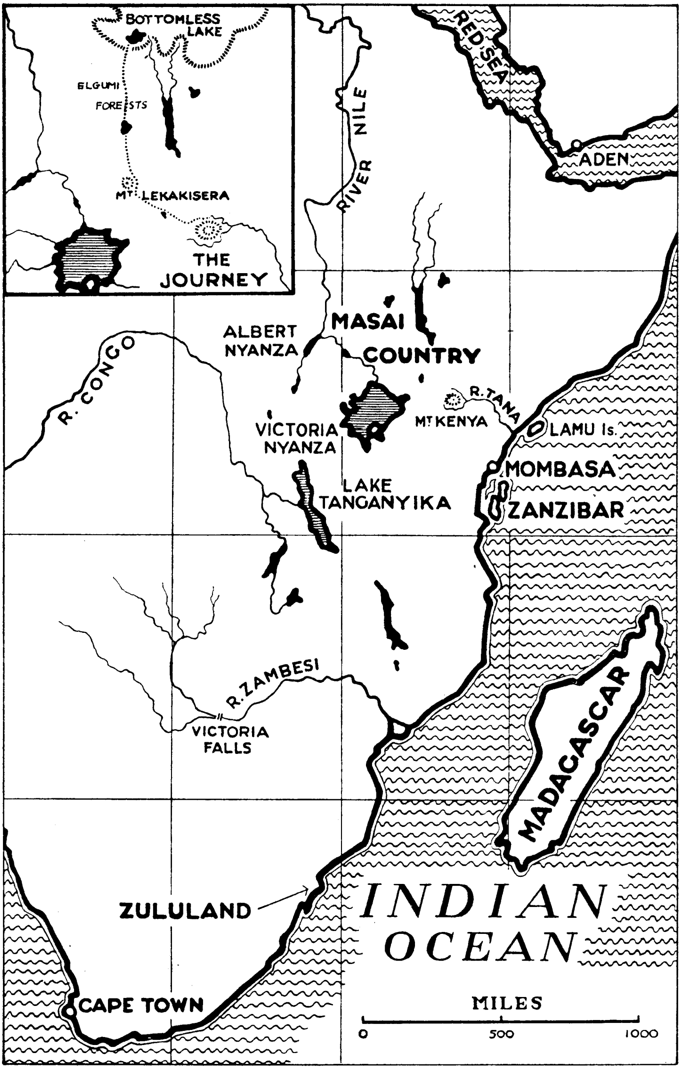
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VICTORIA NYANZA
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Allan Quatermain's Journey

One

BACK TO AFRICA

A. My dear son, of whom I was so proud, is dead. Only a week had passed since the funeral.

I was in my room, walking up and down, and thinking, when I heard the door-bell ring. I went down the steps and opened the door myself; and in walked my old friends, Sir Henry Curtis and Captain John Good. They entered the hall and sat down before the wide fire-place, where a particularly good fire of logs was burning.

"It's very kind of you to come and see me," I said; "it must have been heavy walking in the snow."

They said nothing, but Sir Henry slowly filled his pipe and lit it with a burning stick from the fire. As he leant forward to do this, the fire blazed up brightly and shone upon the scene: and I thought what a splendid-looking man he was. He had a calm, powerful face, large grey eyes, yellow beard and hair: he looked altogether a king among men. Nor was his body less fine than his face. I have never seen wider shoulders or more powerful arms. Sir Henry is six feet two inches high, yet he does not seem a tall man, because he is so strongly built.

As I looked at him, I thought how very different I was myself. Imagine to yourself a small, dried-up, yellow-faced man of sixty-three years of age, with thin hands, large brown eyes, grey hair cut short and standing up like a brush—and you will get a good idea of Allan Quatermain, commonly called by the natives of Africa "Macumazahn"—that is, "He who keeps a good watch at night," or, "The sharp fellow who is not easily deceived".

Then there was Good, who is not like either of us. He is short, dark and fat, with twinkling black eyes, in one of which an eye-glass is always fixed. I am sorry to say that of late years, since our return from King Solomon's Mines, Good has been steadily becoming fatter and fatter. Sir Henry tells him that his fat comes from laziness and over-feeding—and Good does not like to hear this, although it is true.

I got a box of matches and lit the lamp that stood ready on the table. Then I went and fetched a bottle of wine and some glasses. All this time Curtis and Good had been silent—feeling, I suppose, that they had nothing to say which could do me any good; they were content to give me the comfort of their presence and to let me feel that they understood my sorrow and felt with me.

They sat and smoked; and I sat by the fire also smoking and looking at them.

At last I spoke. "Old friends," I said, "how long is it since we got back from Kukuanaland?"

"Three years," said Good. "Why do you ask?"

"I ask because I think I have had enough of this town life. I'm going back to Africa."

Sir Henry laid his head back in his chair and laughed one of his deep laughs. "How very odd," he said; "eh, Good?"

Good gazed at me through his eye-glass and murmured, "Yes, odd—very odd."

"I don't quite understand," said I, looking from one to the other, for I dislike secrets.

"Don't you, old fellow?" said Sir Henry; "then I will explain. As Good and I were walking up here, we had a talk."

"If Good was there, I expect you did," I said, for Good is a great talker; "—and what were you talking about?"

"What do you think?" asked Sir Henry.

"I don't know," I answered. "Good talks such a lot—about such a lot of things."

"Well, it was about a little plan which I have formed

—that we should all pack up our things and go off on another trip to Africa."

"You don't say so!" I cried, jumping up from my chair in my surprise.

"Good is willing," he continued: "aren't you, Good?"

"Rather!" said he.

B. "Listen, old fellow," said Sir Henry: "I am tired of doing nothing but wander round my farm and garden. For a year or more I've been getting restless; I'm always dreaming of Kukuanaland and Gagool and King Solomon's Mines. I want to go back again—and I mean to go back." He paused. "And why should I not go? I have no wife or children to keep me. I am of no importance to anyone."

"Oh," I said, "I thought this would happen sooner or later. And now, Good, what is your reason for wanting to go? Have you got one?"

Good gazed into the fire and waited a few moments before replying. "Well," he said at last, "if you really want to know and will keep it a perfect secret—I'll tell you: I'm getting too fat."

"And now, Quatermain," said Sir Henry, "where are you intending to go?"

I lit my pipe, which had gone out.

"Have you ever heard of Mount Lekakisera?"

"I don't know the place," said Good.

"Did you ever hear of the Island of Lamu?" I asked again.

"No. Oh!—yes! Isn't it a place about three hundred miles north of Zanzibar?"

"Yes. Now listen! I want to go to Lamu and from there make our way about 450 miles to Mount Lekakisera. I believe no white man has ever travelled beyond this point."

"It's a big journey," said Sir Henry thoughtfully. "Why do you want to go *there*?"

"I'll tell you," I answered. "For years and years I have heard stories of a great white race which is supposed to have its home somewhere in that direction. I want to see if there's any truth in those stories. If you fellows like to come—very good; if not, I'm going alone."

"I'll go with you," said Sir Henry, rising and placing his hand on my shoulder, "though I don't believe in your white race."

"So will I," said Good. "I'll start getting myself thin at once. Certainly let us go to Mount Leka—what's the name of the place?—and look for a white race which is not there. It's all the same to me."

"When do you intend to start?" asked Sir Henry.

"In a month's time," I answered, "and don't you be so certain, Good, that things aren't there because *you* have not heard of them. Remember King Solomon's Mines!"

Two

MR. SWAYNE'S STORY

A. Fourteen weeks had passed. After many inquiries we decided that the best starting-point for our journey would be from the Tana River. We learned this from a German trader whom we met on the ship at Aden. He was a very fat man and very dirty, but a good fellow, and he told us a lot of useful things. "Lamu," he said, "you're going to Lamu? Oh, it is a beautiful place," and he turned up his fat face and smiled. "I lived there for a year and a half, and I never changed my shirt—never at all."

We arrived at Lamu and got all our things off the ship. We did not know where to go, so we marched boldly up to the house of Mr. Swayne, officer of the British Government in the island. He received us with great kindness.

Lamu is a very curious place; the things which stand out most clearly in my memory are its dirtiness and its smells. The smells there are fearful. Just below Mr. Swayne's house is the beach. It is left quite bare when the sea goes out and all the waste and dirt of the town are thrown there. I have smelled many evil smells in my life, but never anything like that which arose from the beach at Lamu as we sat on the roof of Mr. Swayne's house.

"Well," said Mr. Swayne, as we smoked our pipes after dinner, "where are you gentlemen intending to go?"

"We want to go to Mount Lekakisera," answered Sir Henry. "Quatermain has got hold of some story about a white race up there."

Mr. Swayne looked interested. "I have heard something of that, too," he said.

"What have you heard?" I asked.

"Oh, not much. All I know about it is that about a year ago I had a letter from Mackenzie, who has a church and a school on the Tana River. His place is a long way up the river—at the farthest point you can get to in a boat."

"What did he say?" I asked.

"He said that a man had arrived at his house who had been two months' journey beyond Mount Lekakisera into a country which no white man had ever visited. There he found a lake called Laga, and he went off from there to the north-east, a month's journey, over desert and great mountains, till he came to a country where the people are white and live in stone houses. They received him with great kindness at first; but later the priests[1] told the people that he was a devil and they drove him away. After journeying for eight months, he reached Mackenzie's place, dying. That's all I know. If you ask me what I think of it—I think it's a lie; but if you want to find out more about it, you had better go up the Tana to Mackenzie's place and ask him."

---

[1] Priest: a man who says prayers to a god in a *temple* (p. 49); a Christian priest prays and teaches in a church.

B. Sir Henry and I looked at each other. This sounded interesting.

"I think we will go to Mackenzie's place," I said.

"Well," answered Mr. Swayne, "that's the best thing to do, but I warn you that the Masai are wandering about round the Tana; and, as you know, they are not pleasant people to deal with. Your best plan would be to take a few carefully chosen men as your own servants, and get other men from each village, as you go along, for carrying your things."

Fortunately there were at Lamu at this time a party of Wakwafi soldiers. The Wakwafi are a fine race. They are great hunters. These particular men had been on a long trip with an Englishman named Jutson. Poor fellow, he had died of disease on his return journey, when he was within a day's march of Mombasa. Mr. Swayne said that we had better hire these men.

We found them in a mud hut outside the town. Three of the men were sitting outside the door, and fine fellows they were. We told them what we wanted and asked them to come with us. They declared that they would not come; they were weary with long travelling and their hearts were sad at the loss of their master. They meant to go back to their homes and rest.

I asked where the other three men were.

"They are asleep in the hut," said one, "but they shall be awakened."

After some minutes they came out of the hut, still looking very sleepy. Two of the men were clearly Wakwafi, but the appearance of the third man gave me a great surprise. He was a very tall, broad man, over six feet high—a pure Zulu. He was a Keshla, or "ringed man."[1] In the centre of his forehead there was a curious hole. As he came out of the hut, he had his hand over his mouth. He took his hand away, and I knew my man at once, although I had not seen him for twelve years.

---

[1] The ring is made of wax worked into and mixed with the hair, and it shows that a Zulu has reached a certain age and rank.

C. "How do you do, Umslopogaas," I said quietly in Zulu.

He was so surprised that he nearly let fall the long battle-axe which he held in his hand.

"Macumazahn! Mighty chief!" he cried. "Clever one! Watchful one! Old hunter whose shot never misses! True friend! A messenger came from Natal and said, 'Macumazahn is dead.' That was years ago, and now, behold, in this place of smells I find Macumazahn, my friend. His hair is a little grey, but his eye is as keen as ever. . . ."

I let him go on talking like this, because I saw that his words were having an effect upon the five Wakwafi, although I hate this Zulu way of praising one to one's face.

"Silence!" I said at last. "You are still the same noisy talker. What are you doing here with these men? When I left you, you were a chief in Zululand. Why are you so far from your own country, and living here with strangers?"

Umslopogaas leant upon his great battle-axe and his face became sad.

"I had a quarrel in my village and I killed three men; and then I fled, and as Macumazahn knows, even though I am old, there is none who can run faster than I. My feet are like the wind. I fled north; for three months I journeyed, resting not, stopping not, running on towards forgetfulness, till I met the party of the white hunter who is now dead. I who am high-born, of the blood of Chaka the great king—I am now a wanderer. I have nothing but this axe." He swung that terrible weapon round his head. "Yet with this axe I will cut out another path to fortune."

"Hear me, Umslopogaas," I said. "You see this tall man, my friend," and I pointed to Sir Henry, "he is a fighter as great as you are. He could throw you over his shoulder. Incubu is his name. And you see this one, the man with the round stomach, the shining eye and the pleasant face. Bougwan (Glass Eye) is his name. He is a good man and comes of a curious race who live in floating villages upon the sea. Now, we three wish to travel beyond Mount Lekakisera into the unknown land beyond, and we don't know what we shall find there. Will you come with us? You shall be chief of all our servants. What will happen to you I know not. When we three travelled before, we took with us a man such as you—Umbopa was his name—and we left him king of a great country. How it will go with you, I know not; perhaps death is waiting for you and for us. Will you throw yourself to fortune and come, or are you afraid?"

Umslopogaas smiled. "Yes," he said, "I will come. Come life, come death, what care I, so long as the blows fall fast and the blood runs red! I am an old fighter. See these marks of wounds upon my body, and see the hole in my head. I killed the man who did that. Do you know how many men I have killed in fair fight, Macumazahn?"

"Be silent!" said I. "Remember, if you come with us, we fight only to defend our lives. Listen; we need servants. These Wakwafi say that they will not come."

"Will not come!" shouted Umslopogaas. "Where is the dog who says that he will not come when my Father orders? Here, you!" He sprang upon one of the Wakwafi and dragged him towards us. "Dog!" he said, shaking him, "did you say that you would not go with my Father? Say it again and I will kill you. Have you forgotten how I saved your brother?"

"No; we will come with the white man."

"'White man'?" went on Umslopogaas. "Of whom are you speaking, you dog?"

"No; we will go with the great chief."

" So! " said Umslopogaas in a quiet voice. He suddenly let go, and the man fell backwards on the ground. " I thought you would."

Three

MASAI!

A. Ten days later we found ourselves at a place called Charra, on the Tana River, after a very interesting journey. Among other things, we visited a ruined city—of which there are many on this coast. These cities are very ancient; they were wealthy and important places thousands of years ago, but their glory has departed—and where once rich merchants stood in the crowded market-place, the lion holds court at night and his deep roar rings through the empty ruined streets.

At Charra we had a quarrel with the head-man of the village. He wanted to make us pay too much for the men who were carrying our things. As a result of the quarrel, he said that he would set the Masai on our tracks. That night he ran away, stealing most of our things. Fortunately he did not steal our guns, as these were in charge of the Wakwafi. After this it was clear to us that we had suffered enough from these hired bearers. Indeed, we had not much left to carry; and yet, how were we to get on?

It was Good who gave us an answer. " Here is water," he said, pointing to the Tana River. " I understand that Mr. Mackenzie's house is on the river; we must get boats."

After three days I succeeded in getting two large boats, each hollowed out of a single log and each able to hold six people. I also got a good supply of paddles.

B. Next day we started. In the first boat were Good, Sir

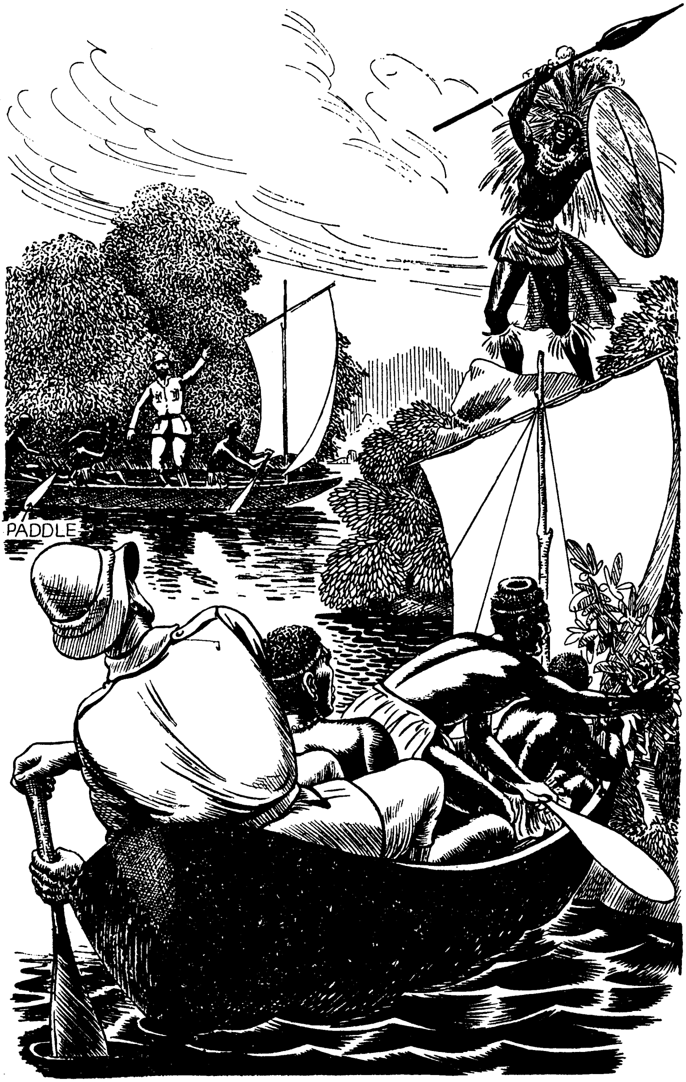
Henry and three Wakwafi; in the second boat there was myself, Umslopogaas and the two other Wakwafi. Good was in charge, commanding the party. On land Good was a gentle and quiet man, but Good in a boat was a perfect devil. He knew all about it, and we didn't. He kept us in order in the same way as he ordered men on his battleship; he was certainly hard on us; but I must say that he was an excellent leader.

After the first day, Good succeeded in fixing up a sail in each boat and this made our labour very much less, but the stream was very strong against us and we could not do more than twenty miles a day. We started each day at dawn and paddled till half-past ten, when it began to get hot. Then we tied our boats to the bank and had a meal and slept till three. Then we started again and went on until an hour before sunset, when we stopped for the night.

When we went on land in the evening, Good at once set us to work to build a hut and to light a fire, and Sir Henry would go with Umslopogaas to shoot something for dinner.

Three days after our start there was an unpleasant event. We were just coming in to the bank to make our camp for the night when we saw a figure standing on a little hill about forty yards away. One look at him was enough to tell me that he was a Masai. Nor had the Wakwafi any doubt. " Masai ! " they whispered in voices of fear.

I have seen many races of men in my life, but I do not think I have ever seen anything quite so fearful as this man. He was huge, quite as tall as Umslopogaas, and beautifully shaped, but his face was the face of a devil. His dress may be seen from the picture. Altogether he was such a sight as would bring terror to the heart of any man, even the bravest of us. While we looked at him, the Masai shook his huge spear at us; then he turned and disappeared on the other side of the slope.



Masai!

"Hullo!" said Sir Henry from the other boat; "I see our friend the chief has done what he said—set the Masai on our track. Do you think it will be safe to go on shore to-night?"

Four

THE BLACK HAND

A. "Do you think it will be safe to go on shore?" shouted Sir Henry again.

I did not think it would be at all safe.

We got back into our boats and moved out into the middle of the stream, which was not very wide. We tied a big stone on to a rope and let the stone down to the bottom of the river, so that our boats might not be carried away by the stream during the night. It would be very dangerous if we floated near the bank while we were sleeping.

All then lay down in the bottom of the boats to get what rest they could.

I could not sleep at all. Thousands of flying creatures were eating me up alive; but this was not all—I felt anxious. I could not help thinking of the dangers around us, and how near they might be. So I lay awake, smoking, and turning over many things in my mind, but wondering for the most part how we might escape from these Masai.

It was a beautiful moonlight night. In spite of my winged enemies and the pain in my right foot (on which I was sitting), and in spite of the noisy sleep of the Wakwafi who was lying near me, I began really to enjoy myself. The moonbeams played upon the running water as it hurried unceasingly past us towards the sea. In the open spaces the river glimmered like a wide sheet of silver, but near the banks the trees threw dark shadows, and the night wind whispered sadly in the long grass by the waterside. To our left, on the farther side of the river, was a little sandy bay which was clear of trees, and here I could see the forms of many animals coming down to the water to drink. Then suddenly there came a terrible roar and all the other beasts fled hurriedly; King Lion came down to the water to drink after his feast. Soon he moved away and then there came a great noise about fifty yards beyond us, and a few minutes later a huge elephant appeared. I could not help thinking how easily I could have shot him as he stood there. He moved away and I saw no more of him.

Just then, on looking towards the bank on our right, I fancied that I saw a dark figure moving noiselessly between the tree trunks. I have very keen sight and I was almost sure that I saw something; but whether it was bird, beast, or man, I could not say. At this moment a dark cloud passed over the moon and I saw no more of it. All other sounds of the forest had ceased. Through the silence came a clear call of a bird; then, except for the whisper of the trees and the long grass, complete silence again.

For no reason I had suddenly become afraid. I am not a fanciful man and I do not believe in magic warnings, yet here I was, all of a sudden filled with a sense of approaching evil. I would not give way to my fear. I would not call the others. Yet I grew worse and worse. My forehead was wet and cold, and my heart was beating wildly. It was like the helpless terror of a bad dream, but my will-power was still strong enough to prevent me from crying out. I lay quiet, but turned my face so as to have a view of Umslopogaas and the two Wakwafi who were sleeping near me.

B. In the distance I heard some beast quietly coming down to the water; and then came that bird-call again, nearer—a high, unnatural note; and the wind began to weep through the trees.

Above me in the sky was a great black cloud, and beneath me ran the black, silent stream: I felt as though Death and I were utterly alone between them. Suddenly my blood seemed to freeze within me and my heart to stand still. Was it fancy—or were we moving? I turned my eyes to look for the other boat which should be at our side. I could not see it, but instead I saw a thin black hand lifting itself above the side. Surely it was a bad dream! At the same moment a face rose out of the water—the face of a devil in human form. I felt the boat pulled down on one side; and then came a quick flash of a knife and a terrible cry from the Wakwafi who was sleeping by my side, and something warm and wet fell upon my face. Blood!

In an instant all doubts vanished; I knew it was no dream, but we were attacked by swimming Masai. Seizing Umslopogaas's battle-axe, which was the first weapon that came to hand, I struck with all my force in the direction in which I had seen the flash of the knife. The blow fell upon a man's arm, catching it against the thick wooden side of the boat and cutting it off completely from the body. As for the owner of the arm, he uttered no sound or cry. Like a silent spirit of the night he came, and silently went, leaving behind him a bloody hand still holding a long knife struck through the heart of our poor servant.

Instantly the silence of the night was broken; all were awake, talking and shouting. I fancied, rightly or wrongly, that I saw several dark heads moving away in the water towards the right-hand bank, and I saw that we were rapidly floating in that direction, for our rope had been cut with the knife. As soon as I saw this I understood the enemy's plan: they had meant to cut the boat loose, so that it might float on to the right bank; and there, no doubt, a party of Masai were waiting to kill us with their broad spears. The Wakwafi was too frightened to be of any use, but Umslopogaas and I worked hard and brought the boat out into the middle of the stream. It was not an instant too soon, for in another minute we should have been stuck on the ground at the side, and then there would have been an end of us.

As soon as we were well out in the middle, we set to work to paddle upstream to where the other boat was. It was very hard and dangerous work to find our way in the dark with nothing but Good's shouts to guide us. At last we reached them, and we were thankful to find that they had not been harmed at all.

Five

RAIN

A. We tied our boat on to the other and all sat waiting for the dawn. At last it came and I have never been more grateful to see the light. In my boat the daylight shone upon a terrible sight. In the bottom of the boat lay the unfortunate Wakwafi with the Masai's knife in his breast—the hand of the Masai still holding the handle. I could not bear the sight; so I pulled up the stone which was holding the boat; I tied the body to it and dropped it over the side. Down it went silently to the bottom of the river. I threw the hand of the murderer into the stream, where it sank slowly. I kept the knife, which had a beautifully-made bone handle and afterwards used it as a hunting knife.

We started out again on our journey, not feeling at all comfortable as to the future; but we hoped to arrive at Mr. Mackenzie's house before night. One hour after sunrise heavy rain began to fall, so we could not use the sails, but had to get along as fast as we could with our paddles. At eleven o'clock we stopped at an open piece of ground on the left bank of the river. The rain was not so heavy and we were able to light a fire and cook some fish. After that the rain came on harder than ever, also the river began to be very difficult; there were many rocks, and the force of the stream was so great that we found it very hard to get along. It became clear to us that we should not reach Mr. Mackenzie's house that night.

At five in the afternoon we were all utterly tired out, and we guessed that we were still quite ten miles from the house. We therefore made the best arrangements we could for the night. We dared not go on land, but fortunately we saw a small island in the middle of the river. We tied up the boats there and went on shore. It was very cold; the rain came down harder than ever, so that we could not light a fire. I do not remember any more uncomfortable night, except perhaps that night when we nearly died of cold on Sheba's Breast on our way to Kukuanaland. There was only one comfort to us, and that was that the Masai did not like getting wet, so we did not feel afraid of a visit from them. But at one o'clock in the morning we again heard the sound of a bird and all made ready for an attack. Nothing happened. I think that perhaps it was a real bird this time.

B. At last the misty fingers of dawn came creeping over the water; and with the daylight the rain ceased. Then out came the glory of the sun, driving away the mists and warming the cold air. Half-dead, utterly weary, we dragged ourselves to our feet and went and stood in the bright sunshine and were thankful for it.

Half an hour later we were getting on quite fast, with the help of a good wind behind us, and we felt almost ready to laugh at the difficulties and dangers which had seemed so great on the day before.

And so we went on till eleven o'clock. We were just thinking of stopping for dinner, when a sudden bend in the river brought us in sight of a fine house, built upon a hill, and encircled by a high stone wall. Close to the house was a huge tree, the top of which we had seen through a spy-glass for the last two days, without knowing that it marked the place of Mr. Mackenzie's house. We all gave a joyful shout. There was no thought of stopping now. On we laboured with our paddles and at one o'clock we were at the bottom of the slope on which the building stood. We ran the boats on to the bank and climbed out on the land. We were just pulling up the boats on to the shore, when we saw three people, dressed in English clothes, hurrying down through the trees to meet us.

"A gentleman, a lady, and a little girl," said Good, looking at them through his eye-glass, "walking through a beautiful garden just as if they were at home; and this place is miles from anywhere, in the middle of Africa. Hang me, if it isn't the most curious thing we've seen yet!"

Good was right. It certainly did seem odd—more like a scene out of a dream or a play than a real fact.

Six

THE SWORD OF GOLD

A. Mr. Mackenzie was a thin, grey-haired man, with a kind face and red cheeks.

"How do you do, sirs," he said, coming forward to meet us. "I hope I see you well. My men told me an hour ago that they spied two boats with white men in them coming up the river, so we've just come down to meet you."

"And we're very glad to see a white face again, let me tell you," added the lady.

We took off our hats and told him who we were.

"Now," said Mr. Mackenzie, "you must all be hungry and weary; so come, gentlemen; very glad we are to see you. The last white man who visited us was Alphonse, whom you'll see later—and that was a year ago."

As he said this, we had been walking up the slope of the hill. The path went through the centre of the garden. I have always loved a good garden and I could have thrown up my hands for joy when I saw Mr. Mackenzie's. There were rows on rows of beautiful fruit trees and flowers such as one might have seen in England.

"Well, you have a wonderful garden," I said.

"Yes," he answered, "it is a very good garden, but we have wonderful weather and it is easy to grow anything."

Just then we came to a high wall running round the house. A stream had been led from a spring inside the wall, so that it ran round the outside of the wall, in order to defend it from attack. Indeed it was just like a castle of old time.

"There!" said Mr. Mackenzie, pointing to the wall and the water. "That took us two years to build, but I never felt safe till it was done. Now we are not afraid of any attack."

We crossed over a little bridge and went through a narrow door in the wall into the flower garden. In the middle of this garden stood a great tree—about seventy feet high.

"There's not another tree like it in all the country round," said Mr. Mackenzie. "I call it my watch-tower. If I want to see all that is happening within fifteen miles, I climb up it with a spy-glass. . . . But you must be hungry. I am sure dinner is ready. Come in; it is a rough place, but we have got one excellent thing—and that is a French cook."

B. I followed him into the house, wondering what he meant. Suddenly there appeared through the door a little man, dressed in a nice blue suit and white shoes. He bowed: " My lady tells me to say that dinner is ready." Just then his eye fell upon Umslopogaas, who was standing behind us, playing with his battle-axe. He threw up his hands in terror. " Oh, what a man," he cried in French, " what a terrible man! See his big axe and the great hole in his head! "

" What are you talking about? " said Mr. Mackenzie.

" Talking about! " replied the little Frenchman, his eyes still fixed upon Umslopogaas, as if he could not take them away. " Why, I'm talking about him—that fearful man! "

At this everybody began to laugh, and Umslopogaas, seeing that he was being spoken about, looked very angry.

" Oh! Oh! Oh! " said Alphonse, " he is angry. I do not like him. I disappear." And he did so—very rapidly. Everyone laughed loudly.

" He is a peculiar fellow," said Mr. Mackenzie. " I'll tell you about him later, but let's now try his cooking. He came here about a year ago and asked to be taken into our service. He had got into some trouble in France and fled to Zanzibar. Orders came to the Government there to seize him and send him back to France; so he rushed off up-country. Some of our men found him by the side of the path, nearly dead for lack of food, and brought him here."

When dinner was over, we lit our pipes and Sir Henry proceeded to give our host an account of our journey and to tell him what we had come for.

" It is clear," said Mr. Mackenzie, " that the Masai were on your tracks, but I do not think they will follow you as far as this."

" I hope," said I, " that we shall not bring danger or trouble upon you.'

" Oh no," said Mr. Mackenzie, " they won't come here and even if they do, we are quite safe. As for me and my family, we are going back to England in a week's time."

"Mr. Swayne told me," I said, "that you had heard something about this strange white people for whom we are looking. Do you know anything of them?"

Mr. Mackenzie, by way of answer, went out of the room and returned bringing with him a most curious sword. It was long, and all the blade was beautifully set with gold. The handle was covered with gold and wonderfully worked.

"There," said Mr. Mackenzie, "did you ever see a sword like that?"

We all examined it. "Never," we said.

C. "Well," said Mr. Mackenzie, "that is all the proof I have of the truth of the man's story, and, without this sword, I should think that his story was all a lie. One afternoon, just before sunset, I was sitting in the garden when a man who looked half-dead came and fell on the ground before me. I asked him where he came from and what he wanted, and he began to tell a long wandering story—that he belonged to a people far in the north, that they were attacked and he and a few others were driven still farther north past a lake named Laga. From there he made his way to another lake that lay up in the mountains—'a lake without a bottom,' he called it. Here his wife and brother died of some illness, and the people drove him out of their village for fear of the disease. Then he wandered over the mountains for ten days and entered a thick forest. There he was found by some *white men,* who were hunting. They took him to a place where all the people were white and lived in stone houses. He stayed there for a week, shut up in a house. Then one night, an old man with a white beard came to him; this wise man examined him; after that he was led away and taken through the forest. He was given food and this sword and told to go."

"Well?" said Sir Henry, who had been listening with breathless interest; "and what did he do then?"

"He had a terrible time, but he did live; and at last he made his way south and reached this place. I never heard anything about his journey south, for I told him to come back next day, and I ordered one of my men to take care of him during the night; but he was so diseased and dirty that my man's wife would not allow him inside the hut. She gave him some old clothes and told him to sleep outside. There was a lion wandering about here just then, and it so happened that he found this unfortunate wanderer and bit his head off. And that was the end of him and his story about white people. I cannot say whether there is any truth in it, or not. What do you think, Mr. Quatermain?"

"I do not know," I answered. "There are so many strange things hidden in the heart of this great country, that I would never readily believe or disbelieve anything. We mean to go, therefore, and find out."

Seven

INTO THE UNKNOWN

A. A week had passed. We were all sitting at supper in Mr. Mackenzie's house, feeling very sad, for at dawn to-morrow we were going to say good-bye to our kind friends and start on our journey. Nothing more had been heard of the Masai Another Englishman was on his way to take charge of the place and Mr. and Mrs. Mackenzie were beginning to think of packing for their voyage home. To-morrow we were to start for Mount Lekakisera, and from there we would set out into the unknown in search of the strange white race of whom the stories told us. We had made a careful note of the story told to Mr. Mackenzie and we intended to follow the track described by that man.

This time we did not mean to have any men to carry our goods. We meant to use asses. We had collected a dozen beasts for this purpose. There were now only two Wakwafi left for servants and we found it quite impossible to get other natives to go with us into those unknown parts which we meant to visit—nor could one blame them. Mr. Mackenzie said that we ourselves were fools to go on such a dangerous trip—and we could not blame others for refusing to be fools with us.

After supper we sat in the garden, smoking our pipes, before going to bed. While we sat there quietly smoking, Alphonse came to us. He made a fine bow and said that he wished to speak to us.

"Well," said Sir Henry, "what is it?"

He explained at great length that he wished to join us on our trip. This surprised me greatly, for I knew that the little man was certainly not brave; indeed, he was very much the opposite. He lived in terror of Umslopogaas and would be, I feared, of very little use to us if there were any fighting to be done. I wondered what his reason for this might be. The reason soon appeared. As Mr. Mackenzie was going to England and a new man was going to take his place, Alphonse thought that the new man would not want to keep him. In fact Mr. Mackenzie had told Alphonse that he was to travel with him to the coast. Alphonse felt quite sure that, if he went to the coast, he would be seized and sent back to France to prison. This was most improbable; probably the French Government had quite forgotten about Alphonse long ago; but he would not believe this. He felt that the dangers of our trip and even the company of Umslopogaas were as nothing beside the danger and unpleasantness of being caught and sent to prison if he went down to the coast. He was a strange fellow, and he would certainly be of little use in difficulty or danger—

but he could cook. I believe he could have made a good dinner out of his grandfather's old shoes. So we agreed to take him.

Morning came, and by seven o'clock our beasts were all loaded, and the time of parting was near. After much hand-shaking and hat-waving, we set out. Alphonse was weeping loudly, for he had a warm heart and was very sorry to part from the Mackenzies. I often think of them and wonder if they got safely home and whether they are all living happily in England now, and whether they will ever read these words. And so good-bye to them, and God bless them for all their kindness to us.

B. We made our way round the lower slopes of the mountains and then went on past the beautiful lake Baringo. Here one of our two remaining Wakwafi was bitten by some poisonous creature hidden in the grass, and died. We marched on from Baringo, a distance of one hundred and fifty miles, to Lekakisera, a wonderful snow-topped mountain, which had never, I believe, been visited before by a European. There we rested for ten days. Then we started out into the huge trackless forest of Elgumi. In this forest there are more elephants than I ever met before or ever heard of. There is no one to shoot them. The only things which keep their numbers down are their own battles. We did not, of course, do any shooting, for we could not have carried away the teeth, and we did not want to waste our powder and shot, for we had not got more than enough. Elephants were not the only wild beasts in the great Elgumi forest. There were all sorts of creatures, and plenty of lions. I have always hated the sight of a lion since one bit my leg, and ever since then I have been unable to walk or run like other men. There were also in this forest *Tsetse* flies, whose bite is death to nearly all animals, but not usually to asses. But our beasts were not healthy, and the *tsetse* flies in the forest were, I think, more poisonous than most—as we found later.

Leaving the great Elgumi forest, we kept on northwards, according to the story of Mr. Mackenzie's wanderer; and after some days, we came to the large lake which he mentioned, called Laga by the natives. It was about fifty miles long and twenty miles broad. From there we travelled on, nearly a month's journey, over great rolling hills, covered with bushes.

All this time we continued to climb and climb; we must have risen about one hundred feet in every ten miles. Indeed the whole country was on a slope, going up and up in the direction of the snow-topped mountains, towards which we were travelling. It was in these mountains that the second lake was to be found—the lake of which the wanderer spoke as " the water without a bottom."

At last we arrived at the foot of the mountains, and we were told by some natives that there was a large lake on the top. We climbed three thousand feet and then came to a steep cliff. Looking down over the edge, we saw a great sheet of water lying fifteen hundred feet below us. The lake was about four miles broad and four miles long. On the edge of it we could see villages. We descended with great difficulty through the forests which covered the steep sides, and at last reached one of the villages. Here we were well received by the people, a simple, peaceful folk who had never seen or even heard of a white man before. They treated us with great respect and kindness, and supplied us with as much food and milk as we could eat and drink.

C. This wonderful and beautiful lake lay at a height of 1,450 feet above the sea and the air was quite cold, not unlike that of England. Indeed for the first three days of our stay there we could see almost nothing of the country round us because of the thick mist which lay over everything. This cold mist set the *tsetse* poison working in our poor beasts, and they all died. On removing the skins of several of them, I found below the skin the long yellow marks which are always seen in beasts which have been bitten by the *tsetse* fly.

This loss left us in great difficulty, for we had now no means of carrying our things. We did not know how to get on; and yet it would be almost equally difficult to go back seven hundred miles to the coast. So we decided at last that the only thing to do was to stay where we were. The natives were friendly and there was plenty of food and we might be able to learn more from them about the countries which lay beyond the mountains.

We bought an excellent boat, hollowed out of the trunk of a tree. It was large enough to hold us all and our things, and we set out to make a trip round the lake in order to find the best place in which to fix our camp. As we did not know if we should return to this village, we put all our things in the boat, and also a quarter of a deer which Good had shot. Some of the natives went before us in their small boats to tell the people in the other villages that we were coming.

And so, like a party of children setting forth happily on an afternoon's holiday, we got into our boat and paddled cheerfully away. We little thought, as we left the shore, that we were at this moment setting forth to meet the most dangerous and terrible moment of our lives.

Eight

THE GATE OF THE UNDERWORLD

A. "How blue the water is!" said Good, as we paddled quietly along. "The natives, who are great fishermen, tell me that the lake is wonderfully deep and that there is a hole in the bottom. They say that the water escaped through this hole and put out some great fire which was burning below."

"A strange story" I answered, "—and yet it may be true, for that mountain, over there, looks very like Mount Vesuvius which once blew up and destroyed the city of Naples. I think that the mountains here are all of the same kind, and there are probably great fires burning underneath."

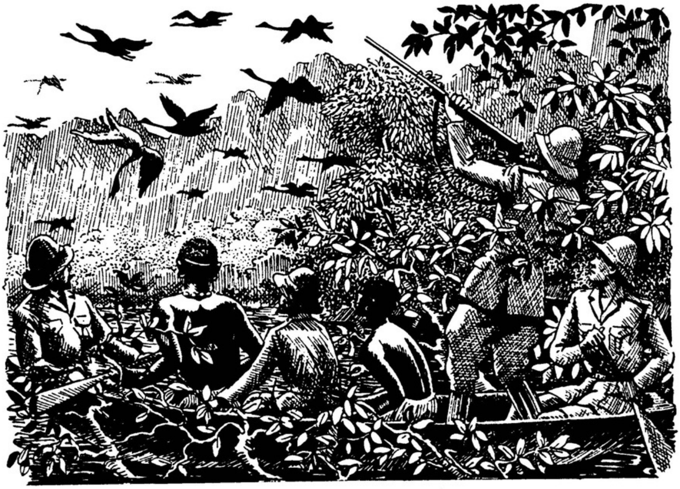
As we approached the farther shore of the lake, we found it to be a huge cliff, rising straight up out of the water. It was just like the side of a bath, for the water lay against the rock without any shore at all. We paddled along the foot of this great rocky wall, keeping about one hundred yards from it. We were trying to reach the end of the lake, where we knew there was a large village.

As we went, we noticed a large number of branches and pieces of wood floating on the water. They must have been brought to this place by some stream running through the lake; but Good wondered at them and could not quite explain how or why they got there.

While we were talking about this, Sir Henry pointed to a lot of large white swans which were feeding some little way in front of us. I had already noticed swans flying about this lake, but I had never seen any swans before in Africa, and I was very eager to catch one. When I first noticed the swans I questioned the natives about them, and I was told that they came from over the mountain and that they always arrived at a certain time of the year and always in the early morning, when it was easy to catch them because they were very tired. I asked the natives what country they came from. They said that they did not know; that on the top of the great rock there was a desert land, and, beyond that land, there were mountains with snow on them and many wild beasts were there; no people lived there; and beyond the mountains were hundreds of miles of forest so thick that even elephants could not get through it. I asked them if they had ever heard of white people like ourselves living on the farther side of the mountains and the forests. At that they laughed. But afterwards a very old woman came and told me that, when she was a little girl, her grandfather had told her about the white people. When his grandfather was a young man, his grandfather said he had crossed the desert and the mountains and had made his way through the forest and had seen a white people who lived in stone houses beyond. Of course this took the story back some two hundred and fifty years and there was nothing very clear or certain about the tale. But still, there the story was again, and I felt that there must be some truth in all these stories. I meant to find out this truth.

Little did I guess in what strange way my wish was to be fulfilled.

B. Well, we began to work to get near the swans, so as to catch one; but, as we moved towards them, they moved away, nearer to the rocky wall. At last we pushed the boat among some floating branches within about forty yards of



them. Sir Henry raised his gun and shot two, killing both. The rest rose up, thirty or more of them, with a great noise, and he fired again. Down came one bird with a broken wing. The rest flew up and up, higher and higher, till they were almost out of sight, level with the top of the great rock; and then I saw them start off for the unknown north-east.

We picked up the two dead birds, and then started to chase the one with the broken wing. Finding it difficult to force the boat through all this floating material, I told the Wakwafi to jump into the water and swim under it. I knew he was a very good swimmer and could not come to any harm. He obeyed and was soon swimming about after the wounded swan—and getting slowly nearer and nearer to the wall of rock.

After a little time, he stopped swimming after the swan and began to cry out that he was being carried away, and indeed we could see that this was the fact; he was swimming with all his strength towards us, and yet he was being drawn slowly towards the rock. With a few powerful strokes of our paddles, we pushed the boat through the floating branches and went towards the man as fast as we could; but, fast as we went, he was drawn faster towards the rock. Suddenly I saw in front of us, just rising about eighteen inches above the water, the top of the arch of a hidden cave. There was the mark of water several feet above it, showing that usually the whole arch was deep under water; but this had been a very dry season, so the lake was very low. Towards this arch our poor servant was being drawn ever faster and faster. He was not more than fifty feet from it, and we were about one hundred and twenty feet, when I first noticed it. The boat rushed along towards him. He struggled bravely and I thought that we would be able to save him. But suddenly I saw a look of despair come upon his face, and there, before our eyes, he was pulled down—down into the water; and he disappeared.

At the same moment I felt our boat seized as by a mighty hand and pulled towards the rock. We were helpless.

C. We understood our danger and we paddled as hard as we could in an attempt to get away. It was useless; in another moment we were rushing straight for the arch like an arrow, and I thought we were lost. Fortunately I had the good sense to shout, " Down on your faces—down! " and I threw myself down into the bottom of the boat. The others did the same. There was a fearful noise as the boat was rubbed against the rock and pushed down till the water began to come in over the sides. I thought we were done for, but no—suddenly the sound ceased; we could again feel the boat moving along. I turned my head a little—I dare not lift it—and looked up. By the faint light I could see a great arch of rock, hanging just over our heads; and that was all. In another minute I could not even see that, for the dim light had been swallowed up in darkness—utter and complete darkness.

For about an hour we lay there, not daring to lift our heads for fear that they should be dashed against the rocky roof. We were not able to speak, for the rushing water drowned the sound of our voices; nor did we wish to speak, for our minds were too full of the fear of instant death—perhaps by being dashed against the side of the cave, or by running on to a rock, or by being drawn down into the rushing water, or perhaps dying for lack of air. I imagined all these and many other forms of death as I lay at the bottom of the boat listening to the roar of the hurrying water—hurrying we knew not where. Only one other sound could I hear, and that was Alphonse's cries of terror coming from the middle of the boat—and even those seemed faint and unreal. Indeed it was all too terrible to describe, more like a fearful dream than anything in real life.

Nine

UNDERGROUND

A. On we rushed, drawn by the mighty power of the stream. After some time I noticed that the sound of the water was not quite so loud as it had been—perhaps this was because there was more room in which the noise might spread.

I could now hear Alphonse's cries more clearly. He was calling upon Heaven, upon a lady by the name of Annette, and upon the Devil. I took a paddle and pushed it hard into his stomach, hoping to silence him; but, thinking that the end of all things had come, he shouted louder than ever.

Slowly and carefully I raised myself on my knees and reached upward with my hand as far as I could; I could not touch the roof. Next I took a paddle and lifted it high above my head, but with the same result. I also held the paddle out to the right and to the left, but I could not touch the sides. Then I remembered that there was a small oil lamp in the boat. I felt about among our things and found it. I lit it and turned the light down on the boat.

The first thing on which the light fell was the white and frightened face of Alphonse: he gave a terrible cry and had to be pushed again with the paddle. Good was lying on his back, his eye-glass still fixed in his eye, gazing into the upper darkness. Sir Henry had his head resting on the side of the boat and with his hand was trying to feel the speed of the water. But when the beam of light fell upon Umslopogaas, I could really have laughed. I mentioned that we put a large piece of cooked deer into the boat—well, it so happened that, when we all threw ourselves down just before the boat went under the arch, Umslopogaas's head had come down very close to this piece of meat. As soon as he recovered from his fear, he began to notice that he was hungry; so he cut off a piece of meat with his axe and was now eating it, with every sign of pleasure. He explained to me afterwards that he thought he was going on "a long journey" and that it would be well to start on it with a full stomach.

B. We put Alphonse at the far end of the boat and Umslopogaas with the lamp at the front as watchman, telling him to warn us if the roof of the cave began to become lower or the sides narrower. We then had a meal.

After dinner we began to ask each other what we had better do and what our chances of safety might be. With some food inside me, I began to feel more hopeful. Possibly the river went straight down into the earth; if it did, we had no hope of escape; but it seemed more probable that it would come out above ground somewhere on the other side of the mountains. All we had to do was to keep ourselves alive until we got there—wherever "there" might be!

Good was less hopeful:

"The river may go wandering on and on underground until it dries up and we shall all die a terrible death."

"Well, let us hope for the best and at the same time prepare ourselves for the worst," said Sir Henry, who was always cheerful, a real tower of strength in time of trouble. "We have come out of so many dangerous places together that I fancy we shall come out of this."

This was excellent advice and we proceeded to take it, each in his own way—except Alphonse, who was still half-dead with fear. Good went to the back of the boat and took a paddle to guide it. Umslopogaas kept watch in the front. Sir Henry and I lay down in the middle, waiting to take our turn when the other two were tired.

It was certainly a very curious state to be in, I thought, rushing along under the earth, borne upon the breast of an underground river, like souls being carried to the Underworld. How dark it was! The faint beam from our little lamp only served to show the darkness. There at the front sat Umslopogaas like a figure carved out of coal, and at the back I could see Good gazing into the darkness and trying in a vain attempt to see the way.

"Well," thought I, "I came in search of excitement, and I have certainly got it. I ought to be ashamed of myself—an old man who should be sitting quietly by the fire at home. But perhaps I shall come through safely; and, if I don't, an underground river makes a very good grave."

Ten

THE ROSE OF FIRE

A. It was nearly mid-day when we entered the cave: it was two o'clock when I lit the lamp. We decided that each of us would go on duty for three hours; so at seven o'clock Sir Henry went on watch at the front and I took the paddle; and the other three lay down and went to sleep.

For three hours all went well. Once Sir Henry found it necessary to push the boat off from the side. What seemed to me most curious about this wonderful river was—how did the air keep fresh? It was hot, but it was not bad or unpleasant. But after a time I began to notice a change. The air seemed to be getting warmer and warmer. At first I took no notice of it, but, after another half hour, I found that it was growing hotter and hotter; so I called to Sir Henry and asked him if he noticed it, or if I had only imagined it.

"Noticed it!" he answered. "Of course I've noticed it. I feel as if I was in a hot bath."

Just then Good woke up, feeling the heat, and began to take off his clothes.

Hotter it grew and hotter yet, till we could hardly breathe. Half an hour more and we could hardly bear the heat. I put my hand in the water—but drew it out with a cry; it was almost boiling. A thick mist rose up.

" We must be passing near some underground fire," said Sir Henry.

Our sufferings for some time after this were more than I can describe. We seemed to be dried up by the heat. We lay in the bottom of the boat, feeling like hot coals. We could not keep watch nor try to guide the boat at all. Our skins began to crack and the blood beat in my head like the beating of a great drum.

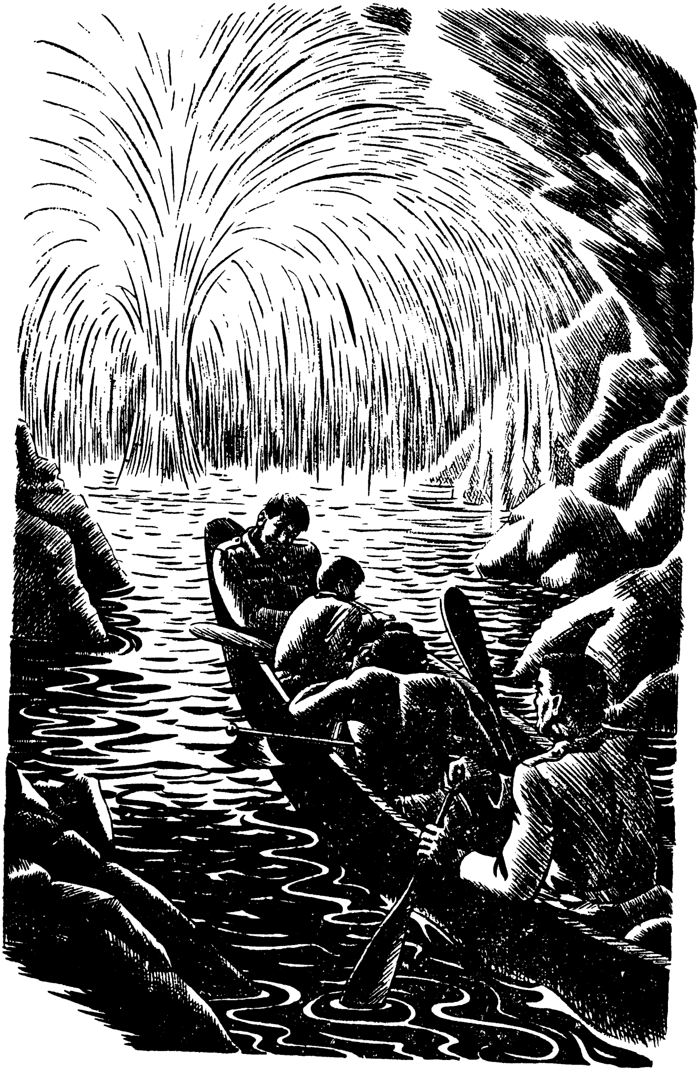
Suddenly the river turned a little and I heard Sir Henry call out from the front in a voice of fear. Looking up, I saw the most wonderful and terrible sight.

About half a mile in front of us, a huge white flame rose from the water and sprang fifty feet into the air; then it struck the roof and spread out and fell back in sheets of fire. The whole thing was shaped like a great and beautiful rose, and it lit up the whole cave as clear as day. We could see the roof high above us, washed smooth with water, and the black rocky walls with thin golden lines running through them, like the branching lines on a leaf.

On we rushed towards this rose of fire—hotter and fiercer than any fire ever lit by man.

" Keep the boat to the right, Quatermain—to the right," shouted Sir Henry, and a minute afterwards I saw him fall forward senseless. Alphonse had already fallen. Good was the next to go. There they lay as though dead; only Umslopogaas and I kept our senses.

We were within fifty yards of it now, and I saw Umslopogaas's head fall forward on his hands. He had gone too, and I was alone.



I would not yield—I must not yield!

I could not breathe; the fierce heat dried me up. For yards and yards round the great rose of fire the rock-roof was red-hot. The wood of the boat was almost burning. I saw the feathers on one of the dead swans begin to wrinkle and blacken. . . . I would not yield—I must not yield! I knew that, if I lost my senses, we should pass within three or four yards of the flame, and we should all be killed. I set the paddle so as to turn the boat as far as possible to the right. And I held on. . . .

We were nearly opposite it now; it roared like a fire of the Devil himself, and the water boiled fiercely around it. Five seconds more. . . .

I heard the roar behind me. We were past!

Then I too fell senseless.

Eleven

BLACK DEVILS

A. I felt a breath of air upon my face. My eyes opened with great difficulty.

Far, far above there was light, though around me all was dim. Then I remembered, and looked. The boat was still floating down the river, and in the bottom of it lay my companions. "Were they dead?" I wondered; "was I alone in this terrible place?" I did not know.

I began to feel a burning thirst. I put my hand over the edge of the boat into the water—but drew it back with a cry. Nearly all the skin was burnt off the back of it. The water was cold; I drank and poured it over myself. My body seemed to draw in the liquid, as a brick wall drinks in the rain after dry weather; but where I was burnt, the touch of it caused fearful pain.

Then I thought of the others. I dragged myself towards them with difficulty and scattered them with water. To my joy, they began to recover—Umslopogaas first, then the others. Then they drank.

Good pointed to the side of the boat: it was burnt black with the heat. If it had been built of separate boards like an English boat, it would have let in the water and we should have sunk; but fortunately it was dug out of the trunk of one great tree and the sides and bottom were three or four inches thick. As soon as we felt stronger, we began to look about us. I have said that there was light above us; it came from the sky. Our river was no longer underground, but was running between huge cliffs nearly two thousand feet high. They were so high that, though the sky shone above us, we were almost in darkness below. The great straight cliffs rose up like walls on either side of us and a narrow space of sky lay between them, like a thin blue line. Here and there on these grey rocky walls grew some creeping plant, hanging from them like the white beard on the face of a dead man.

By the river's edge was a little shore, formed of round pieces of rock washed into this shape by the constant action of the water. It was clear that, when the underground river was high, there was no beach at all; but now there was a space of seven or eight yards.

B. We decided to go on land in order to rest ourselves a little and to stretch our limbs. It was a terrible place, but it would give us an hour's rest from the terrors of the river, and also allow us to re-pack our things and arrange them in the boat.

" My word! " called out Good, who came on shore the first. " What a fearful place! It's enough to give one bad dreams," and he laughed.

Instantly a thundering voice took up his words, repeating them louder and louder a hundred times. *" Bad Dreams! Ho! Ho! Ho!" " Dreams! Ho! Ho! Ho!"*

answered another voice from far up the cliff. "*Dreams! Dreams! Dreams!*" repeated voice after voice, each throwing the words from side to side with shouts of terrible laughter, till the whole valley rang with the words and the laughter. And then the noise ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

"Oh, the Devil!" cried Alphonse, frightened to death. "*Devil! Devil! Devil!*" the voices thundered and wept and cried.

"Ah," said Umslopogaas calmly, "I see clearly that devils live here. Well, the place looks like it."

I tried to explain to him the cause of all the noise. I told him that the sound was thrown back by the rocky cliffs.

"No," he said, "it is devils. One of these devils lived beside my house in Zululand and the maidens used to talk to it; but these are full-grown devils; mine at home was only a baby. But these devils are fools," he added carelessly: "they can only say what one says; they do not seem to be able to make words of their own, and they dare not show their faces." It was clear that he had a very low opinion of these poor devils.

After this we found it necessary to talk to each other in whispers, but even our whispers ran up the rocks in strange murmurings until at last they died away in long-drawn sighs of sound.

We began to wash our burns at the river's edge; we took the skin off one of the swans and used its fat to rub on them. Then we re-packed our things in the boat and at last began to take some food. We seated ourselves in a circle and were soon eating our cold meat with great enjoyment. But I felt too sick and faint after my sufferings of the night before to eat much.

It was a curious meal, for the light was so dim that we could scarcely see the way to cut the food and put it in our mouths.

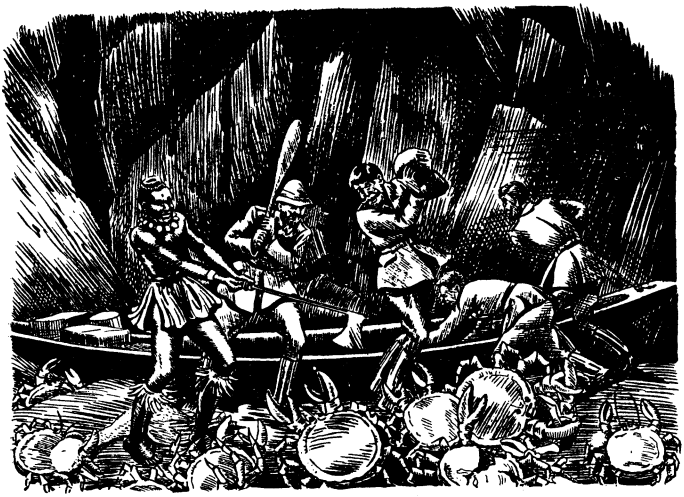
And then I happened to look behind me . . . !

C. I heard the noise of something moving over the stones. Then I saw, sitting upon a rock just behind my back, a great black crab. It was five times larger than any crab I had ever seen. Its eyes stuck out on sticks and seemed to gaze at me. And this was not the only one.

From every side dozens of these fearful beasts were creeping up—drawn, I suppose, by the smell of the food. Out they came from between the round stones and out of holes in the rock. Some were already quite close to us. I gazed at them, unable to take my eyes off the sight. As I did so, I saw one of the beasts stretch out and give Good such a surprise behind that he jumped up with a cry and set all the voices shouting to each other again. Just then another very large one got hold of Alphonse's leg and refused to give it up—as may be imagined, a wonderful scene followed. Umslopogaas took his axe and cracked the shell of the great crab with it; then it began to cry out in a most fearful way and its cries were repeated among the rocks. An evil-smelling white liquid came from its mouth, and the smell brought hundreds more of its friends out of holes and corners. They fell upon the wounded animal, tore it limb from limb and ate it.

Seizing whatever weapons we could find, such as stones and paddles, we began a war upon these beasts—whose numbers were increasing rapidly and whose smell was terrible.

As fast as we cracked their shells, others seized the wounded ones and ate them, giving wild cries as they did so. When they could, they seized hold of us, or tried to steal the meat. One huge fellow got hold of the swan we had skinned and began to drag it away. Instantly dozens of others threw themselves upon the food, and there began a fearful scene. How the beasts cried and tore the meat and tore each other, and how the evil-smelling white liquid flowed! It was a foul and unnatural sight and one which will live in the minds of all of us until our last days. They seemed so human, as if all the most evil desires of



The battle of the crabs

man had entered the shell of a huge crab and gone mad. They were so terribly brave, and so wise in their way; and they looked as if they understood.

"I say, you fellows, let's get out of this, or we shall go mad," cried Good, and we were not slow to agree. We quickly got into the boat and pushed it out into the water, leaving behind us the rest of our meal and the foul-smelling, struggling mass of creatures in possession of the ground.

"Those are the devils of the place," said Umslopogaas, as if he had now found the answer to the question in his mind; and I felt almost ready to agree with him.

D. "What's to be done now?" said Sir Henry.

"Float on, I suppose," I answered. And so we floated on all the afternoon and well into the evening. We floated on in the dim light, beneath the far-off line of blue sky, scarcely knowing when the day ended and night began:

down in that huge valley—that crack in the world—there was little difference. Good pointed to a star hanging right above us; and then suddenly it disappeared. The darkness was darker and a murmuring sound filled the air.

" Underground again," I said sadly. I held up the lamp. Yes, there was no doubt about it. I could just see the roof. We were underground again.

Then began another long night of danger and terror. About midnight we struck on a flat rock in the middle of the stream and were very nearly overturned and drowned.

The hours passed on till it was nearly three o'clock. Sir Henry, Good, and Alphonse were asleep, utterly worn out. Umslopogaas was at the front of the boat and I at the back. Then I noticed that the speed at which we were travelling had increased greatly. Suddenly I heard Umslopogaas give a cry, and the next moment there came a sound of breaking branches. The boat was being forced through hanging bushes.

In another minute a breath of sweet open air blew upon my face, and I felt that we had come out from underground and were floating upon the clear water. I say " felt," for I could see nothing; the darkness was black, as it often is blackest just before the dawn. But I was filled with joy.

We were out of that terrible river. I did not know where we had got to, but that was something to be thankful for. I sat down and breathed in the sweet night air and waited for the daylight.

Twelve

DAWN

A. For an hour or more I sat waiting in the darkness; then slowly the eastern sky turned grey, and huge misty shapes moved over the water. The grey turned to yellow and the yellow became red. Bright bars of light sprang up in the eastern sky; then came the arrows of dawn scattering the dark shadows and touching the distant mountain-tops with light.

In another moment the Golden Gates of Dawn were opened and the sun himself came forth in glory.

As yet I could see nothing save a beautiful blue sky above, for over the water lay a thick covering of mist. Slowly the sun drew up the mists, and I found that we were floating upon a lovely sea of blue water of which I could not see the shore in front of us. Eight or ten miles behind us there stretched, as far as the eye could see, a range of hills. Without doubt it was through some entrance in these hills that the underground river found its way into this lake.

Umslopogaas was the next to wake. He looked round him and saw a dark object in the water. He pointed it out to me. A few strokes of the paddle brought the boat to the place. There we discovered that the object was the body of a man, floating face downwards. Umslopogaas turned him on his back with his paddle, and we recognized the dead face of—whom do you suppose? It was our poor Wakwafi servant who had been drawn two days before into the waters of the river. It quite frightened me. I thought we had left him behind for ever, and behold! borne by the stream, he had made the terrible journey with us, and with us had reached its end. His appearance was dreadful, for he bore traces of having touched the Rose of Fire; one arm was blackened and all his hair was burnt off.

Suddenly, without any warning, the body began to sink, as though it had been sent to us to carry a message, and, having given its message, it retired. Down it went into the clear, deep water.

Umslopogaas watched the body thoughtfully. "Why did he follow us?" he asked. "This does not look well. He came to bring us ill-fortune."

I turned on him angrily, for I dislike these unpleasant ideas and this talk of good and bad fortune.

B. Just then the others woke up. We were all very hungry, but there was hardly any food in the boat, as we had left almost everything to those terrible black crabs. We, therefore, decided to set out for the shore immediately. But a difficulty arose—we did not know where the shore was.

We noticed that the birds kept flying from our left. " I think," said Sir Henry, " that the shore must be over there on the left, for the birds are leaving their feeding-grounds on shore to pass the day on the lake."

This seemed very probable, so we set out in that direction. After we had paddled for about half an hour, a good wind sprang up, blowing in the direction we wanted, so with our spare clothes we fixed up a sail which took us along merrily.

When we had been sailing for an hour, Good, who was looking round with a spy-glass, suddenly cried out that he saw land. " I think from the change in the colour of the water," he added, " that we must be approaching the mouth of a river."

In another minute we saw a great round golden roof standing up above the morning mists. We were wondering what this gigantic roof could be when Good reported that a small sailing-boat was advancing towards us. In a few more minutes it became clear that the people in the sailing-boat had seen us. They stopped as though in doubt, then came on towards us with great swiftness. In ten minutes more the boat was within one hundred yards, and we saw that it was well made and built in the European way—with boards, not dug out of the trunk of a tree—and it carried a very large sail for its size. We turned our eyes from the boat to the two people who were in it—a man and a woman. *They were white*—white as ourselves!

We gazed at them in wonder. So the story *was* true!

We had discovered this people of whom we had heard. I could have shouted for joy when I thought of the glory and the wonder of the thing.

C. The man in the boat was strong and well built. He had straight black hair and a fine, interesting-looking face. He was dressed in a brown cloth garment rather like a shirt, with bare arms, and in a short skirt reaching as far as his knees. Round the right arm and left leg he wore thick rings of gold. The woman had a sweet face, with large eyes, and curling brown hair. Her dress was of the same material as the man's, but came down to her feet. Good, of course, was very interested in the lady.

If we were surprised at the appearance of the man and the woman, it was clear that they were far more surprised and interested in us. The man sailed round and round our boat, but did not approach. At last he came a little nearer and called to us in a language which we could not understand. We answered him in English, French, Latin and in all the languages we knew, but he did not seem to understand any of them. As for the lady, she was busily employed in gazing at us each in turn, and Good returned her gaze through his eye-glass; this seemed to amuse her.

Suddenly the man turned his boat round and started off for the shore at a great speed. Good waved and kissed his hand to the lady and she waved her hand back at him.

"It seems to me," said Sir Henry, "that we have at last found a language which the people of this country understand."

I was not pleased by Good's foolish way of behaving. "It's very clear to me," I said, "that before long that man will come back with a number of his fellows, and we had better decide how we are going to receive them."

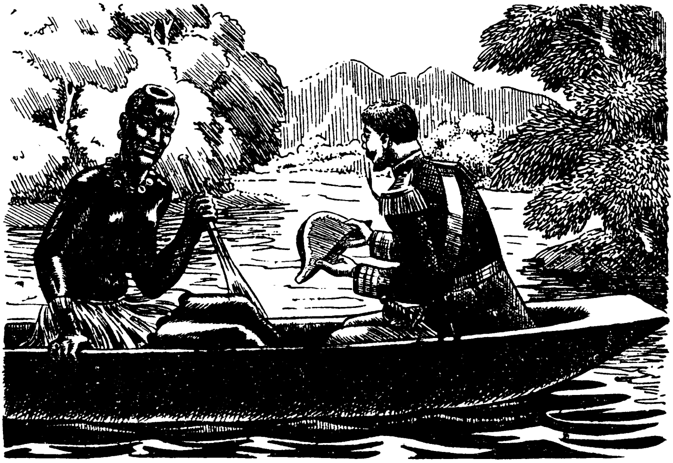
"The question is—how *they* will receive *us*," said Sir Henry.

D. As for Good, he said nothing, but began to take from the bottom of the boat a small square tin box which we had dragged about everywhere with us. We had often asked him to leave this useless thing behind—since he never seemed to open it—but he was determined to keep it, and answered that it might come in useful one day.

" What are you going to do, Good? " said Sir Henry.

" Do? Dress, of course. You don't want me to appear in a new country in these clothes, do you? "

He took off his clothes, jumped over the side and had a bathe in the lake. This seemed to us a good idea and we did the same. When Good got back into the boat, he dried himself in the sun; then from his tin box he produced certain objects carefully done up in paper. He took off the paper and we beheld—what do you think?—the full dress of the captain on an English battle-ship—blue and gold—very beautiful! When Good had finished dressing, he was really a wonderful sight. We others did the best we could to improve our appearances; even Umslopogaas took some oil from the lamp and polished up his head-ring; but, of course, Good far out-shone us all.



"You see," said Good, when we had all finished, "one does judge people very much by the first appearance; and there will be ladies; so one of us, at least, ought to be properly dressed."

"Oh, Bougwan! " said Umslopogaas, "I always thought you an ugly little man, and fat as a cow, but now you are like a beautiful bird when it spreads its tail out. Oh, Bougwan, it hurts my eyes to look at you! "

Umslopogaas meant well, but Good did not seem to be pleased.

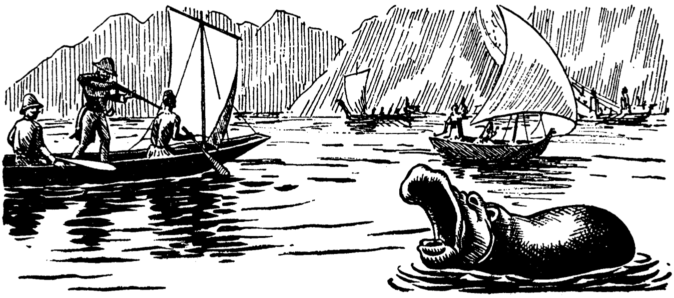
Thirteen

THE HANGING CITY

A. After a few minutes we saw coming from the harbour a large number of boats. One of these was very much larger than the others: it was a rowing-boat with twenty-four rowers. We could see in it a number of soldiers, and in the front stood an old man with a white beard and a sword at his side who was clearly the captain. The other boats merely carried people from the city who were curious to see us. All the people in these boats were white, as white as the two whom we had first seen—white as ourselves.

"Now," said I, "what's going to happen? Are they going to be friendly, or will they attack us? "

Just at this moment, Good saw a hippopotamus rise in the water some distance away, and a most unfortunate idea came to us. We thought that it would be useful to show these people something of our power so that they might treat us with respect. It was foolish; it was cruel; it was silly beyond words; but men *do* do silly things when they are tired or over-excited. Good, who is not a good shot, raised his gun and fired. I looked round after the shot had been fired. It was clear that these people had never seen a gun before. The boats had stopped. I could see every sign of surprise and fear. Even the old gentleman in the rowing boat seemed to be very excited; but there seemed to be something else—some other feeling. I did not like the effect which we had produced.



Captain Good shoots at the hippopotamus

Good had not killed the beast, but had only wounded it. Mad with anger and pain, it came up again, not near our boat, but close to the sailing boat of the man and woman who had first seen us. It turned and went straight at it to attack them. With its huge mouth it tore a great piece out of the side; the boat turned over and the man and woman were thrown into the water. The next moment, before we could do anything to save them, the huge creature was up again and going open-mouthed at the poor girl who was struggling in the water. I lifted my gun just as the great mouth was about to close on her, and fired over her head, right down the throat of the animal. Over he went, and began to turn round and round. I fired again, and that finished him: he sank instantly. We paddled quickly towards the girl and took her into our boat, while the people around shouted in excitement. She was shocked and very frightened, but unhurt.

The boats had gathered together at a distance, and we could see that the people in them were considering what to do. We thought it better to give them no time, or they might decide against us. We paddled towards them. Good stood up in the front of the boat, raising his hat politely in every direction and smiling. Most of the boats moved away as we advanced, but a few remained. The big rowing boat came on to meet us. Soon we were beside it, and I could see that our appearance—especially the appearance of Good and Umslopogaas—filled the old captain with surprise not unmixed with fear.

Good took off his hat to the old gentleman and asked in English after his health. The old gentleman replied by laying the first two fingers of his right hand across his lips and holding them there for a moment. This seemed to be their way of greeting people. He then said something, but I shook my head to show that I did not understand. Then, as I was very hungry, I thought I might say so. I tried every language I knew—but without effect. Then at last I opened my mouth and pointed to it, and rubbed my stomach. The old gentleman clearly understood these signs, for he nodded his head and pointed towards the harbour. Then one of the men on his boat threw us a rope, and the ship started off pulling us behind.

In about twenty minutes we reached the entrance of the harbour. It was crowded with boats full of people who had come out to see us. We passed through the harbour and began to go up the river. We came round the bend of the river, and all gave a cry of surprise and delight as we caught our first view of Milosis,[1] the Hanging City, capital of the country, Zu-Vendis,[2] of the Zu-Vendi nation.

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[1] *Mi*=city, *Losis*=hanging; the Hanging City. It is so called because it is built on the top of a high cliff overhanging the river.

[2] *Zu*=yellow, *Vendis*=country; the yellow country. I learned afterwards that the country got this name because so much gold was found in it.

Fourteen

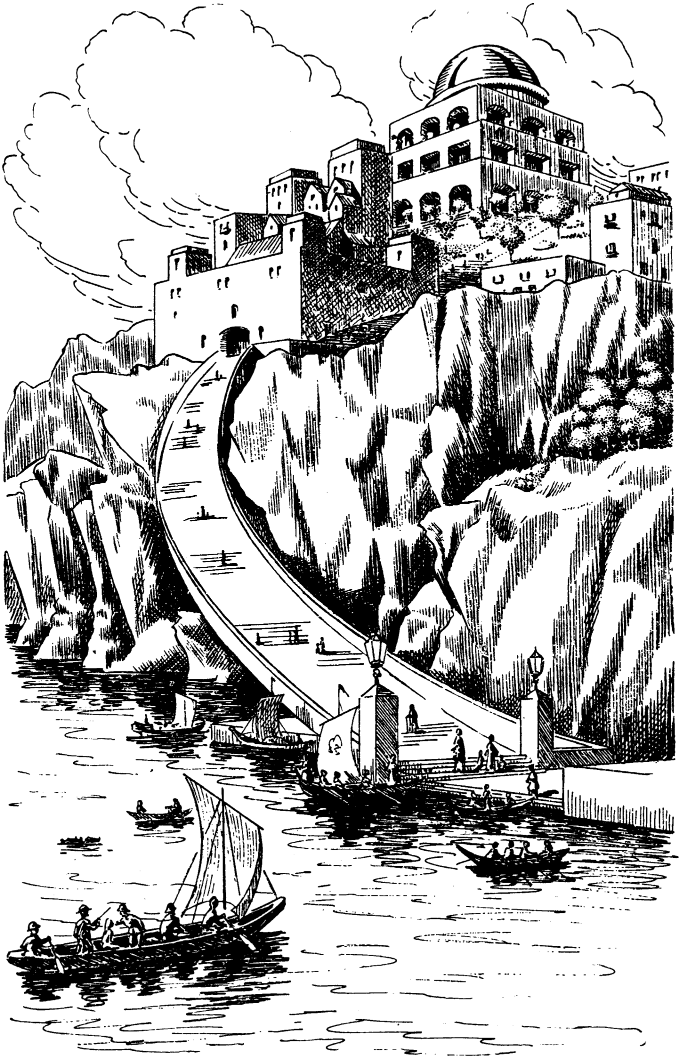
THE SISTER QUEENS

A. About five hundred yards from the river-bank rose a great cliff of grey stone about two hundred feet high. On the top of this cliff stood a great building, made of the same grey stone. This was the Palace of the Queen—or rather, of the Queens. It stood on three sides of a square, and the fourth side, the front, was closed in by a high wall.

At the back of the palace the town sloped gently upwards to a flashing building of white stone with a great, round, golden roof—which we had already seen through the mist. This was the Temple of the Sun. Except the Temple of the Sun and the Palace, all the other houses in the city were made of red stone. The houses were laid out in regular squares with splendid roads between. At the back of the palace a very wide road stretched away up the hill for a distance of a mile and a half and ended in the open space which lay round the white building that crowned the hill. But just in front of us, as we stood near the river-bank, was the wonder and glory of Milosis—the great stair.

Let the reader imagine, if he can, a splendid stair-way, sixty-five feet wide, built in one gigantic arch two hundred feet high and reaching from the river-bank up to the top of the cliff. It is perhaps the most wonderful thing of its kind in the whole world—a thing of which any living man might be proud, both because of its size and its beauty.

B. We afterwards learnt the story of the stair-way. It was begun hundreds of years ago. Four times the work was started, but the task proved too difficult and it was given up. Then for three hundred years the stair stood there.



This was the Temple of the Sun

half-finished. At last there came a young man named Rademas who said that he would complete it successfully; if he failed, he was to be thrown from the cliff, and if he was successful, he was to be given the hand of the King's daughter in marriage. Five years were allowed him to complete the work, and all the labour and material he wanted. Three times did his arch fall; and at last, thinking that the task was impossible, he decided to kill himself. But that night a beautiful woman came to him in a dream and touched his forehead, and suddenly he saw in his dream the completed work. He saw how to get over the difficulties which had made him fail before. He awoke and began to work again, but on a different plan, and was at last successful. On the last day of the five years he led the Princess up the stair and into the palace as his wife. In time Rademas became King, and all the later kings and queens were his descendants. In memory of this great success, Rademas made a stone figure of himself, dreaming, and of the beautiful woman who touched him on the forehead, and he put this work of art in the great hall of the palace, and there it stands to this day. . . .

C. The rowing-boat stopped at the foot of the great stair-way. The old gentleman landed and signed to us to follow him. As each of us stepped on land, he laid his fingers on his lips as a greeting. The last to leave the boat was the girl whom we had picked up out of the water. Her companion was waiting for her. Before she went away, she kissed my hand—to thank me, I suppose, for having saved her from the hippopotamus. She was going to kiss Good's hand too, but the young man would not let her do so and led her quickly away—to my great delight.

As soon as we were on shore, a number of the rowers took our goods and carried them up the stair-way, but our guide turned to the right and led us into a small house, which we found to be an inn. We went into a large room in which a meal was laid ready for us. Our guide signed to us to sit down to it. I cannot describe what the food was or how it was cooked, but it was certainly very nice and the wine was excellent. When we had finished eating, we rose from the table feeling like new men.

While we were eating, the old gentleman, our guide, stood by, looking at us with interest and he seemed to be specially interested in our guns. As soon as we had finished, he bowed towards Good, whom he took to be the leader of the party. He led us through the door to the foot of the great stair-way. We paused for a moment to admire two gigantic lions, each cut from a single piece of stone, then we began to climb up the steps.

Umslopogaas made it a rule never to show any surprise, but to-day even he looked at the stair in wonder and asked if " the bridge had been built by men or devils ".

When we reached the middle step we paused to admire the wonderful view of the country, as it stretched out beyond the blue waters of the lake. At the top we found ourselves in a court-yard which had three doors. The doors on the right and left opened on to roads leading into the city. The door in the centre was very strongly made of wood, strengthened with brass.

D. At our approach the door was thrown open and we were met by a soldier who held a great spear in his hand. I noticed that he carried a sword at his side, and this sword was almost exactly like that which Mr. Mackenzie had shown us. Our guide said something to the soldier, who then let the iron point of his spear fall with a ringing sound upon the stone floor. We passed through into the inner court-yard of the palace; there were trees and flowers in it. After crossing this court-yard, we went under a heavy arch-way and found ourselves in the great hall. At one end of this hall were the stone figures of the angel and Rademas dreaming, and in the centre was a great black stone. This stone was believed by the Zu-Vendi people to be very holy. It was said to have fallen from the Sun—and the

Sun was the God of the Zu-Vendis. There was a curious saying that, when this black stone was broken, a king of a foreign race would rule over the land.

At the far end of the hall two thrones were set side by side. On the right of the thrones a number of people were standing; they were dressed in white silk with different coloured edges and they all had golden swords. They seemed to be the lords and noblemen of the country. On the left was a small group of six men. These men were dressed in plain white garments, and on the breast of their garments a picture of the rising sun was worked in gold. They were all old men. One of them was a very interesting figure; he was very old—eighty at least—and had a long white beard, and on his head he wore a round cap covered with gold. The heads of the others were bare.

We afterwards learnt that these six men were the priests, and the man with the cap was Agon the High Priest.

As we entered the hall, the priests and noblemen all rose and bowed to us. Some servants brought seats and placed them in line in front of the thrones, and we sat down.

Scarcely had we done so, when there came a burst of music from the right, which was answered by another from the left. Next a man entered on the right and said something in a loud voice, ending with the word "Nyleptha"; he repeated the name three times. Then another man said something in front of the other throne and ended by saying the word "Sorais" three times. We heard the sound of men marching on right and left, and from each side came in a small company of splendid soldiers armed with spears. They drew themselves up in line, then let the points of their spears fall upon the stone floor with a loud noise. There was another burst of music; then from each side, each attended by six maidens, entered the sister Queens of Zu-Vendis.

Fifteen

SEEDS OF TROUBLE

A. I have seen beautiful women in my day, but language fails me when I try to give some idea of the blaze of loveliness that then broke upon us in the person of these sister Queens.

Both were young—perhaps twenty-five years of age; both were tall and beautifully formed; but there the likeness stopped.

One—Nyleptha—was very fair. Her skin showed like snow against her white and gold garment, and her face was one which few men could look upon and forget. Her hair was like a crown of gold half hiding her forehead; her eyes were grey, full of queenly tenderness.

Her sister, Sorais, was of a different and darker kind of beauty. Her hair was coal black and it fell in masses on her shoulders. Her skin was dark and her eyes deep brown, and I thought that her full lips were rather cruel. Her quiet, cold face gave an idea of hidden fires, and I wondered how it would look if anything happened to break its calm.

As the two Queens passed their thrones, I saw them look swiftly in our direction. Their eyes passed me, seeing nothing to charm them in the person of a thin little old man. Then they looked with surprise at the great fierce form of Umslopogaas, who raised his axe as a mark of respect. Next their eyes were drawn by the glory of Good's clothing, and then they moved from him to where Sir Henry Curtis stood. The sunlight from a window was shining upon his yellow hair, lighting up the beauty and strength of his form against the faint darkness of the hall. He raised his eyes, and they met those of Nyleptha; and thus for the first time, the finest man and woman it has ever been my fortune to see, looked one upon the other. I saw the swift blood run up beneath Nyleptha's skin, as dawn lights up the morning sky: and then the colour faded from her face and her eyes were turned away. I looked at Sir Henry: he, too, had coloured up to the eyes. "Oh, my word!" thought I to myself, "the ladies have come upon the scene, and now we may expect trouble!" And I sighed and shook my head, knowing that the beauty of a woman is like the beauty of fire; it destroys and leaves behind it a desert.

When I looked up again both the Queens were on their thrones. Horns were sounded; the Court seated itself, and Queen Sorais signed to us to do the same.

B. From among the crowd, our guide stepped forward—the old gentleman whom we had seen on the boat. He was holding by the hand the girl whom we saved from the hippopotamus. He bowed to the Queens and proceeded to address them. He seemed to be describing how he had found us, and it was amusing to watch the surprise and fear upon their faces as they listened to his tale. Then he began pointing to the girl and it was clear that he was talking about the hippopotamus. It was also clear that there was something very wrong about that hippopotamus, for the priests broke in upon the story with frequent cries of anger. He pointed to the guns in our hands and the two Queens looked surprised as he spoke about them.

To make matters clear, I may as well explain at this point that the hippopotamus is considered by the Zu-Vendis as a holy animal belonging to their God, the Sun, and that animal which we had shot was one of some six beasts, kept at the mouth of the harbour and fed daily by the priests.

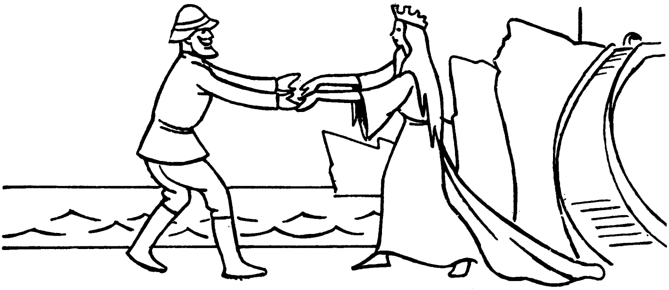
When our guide had finished his tale the High Priest Agon rose from his place and began a long and fierce speech. I did not like the look of his cold grey eye, as he fixed it on us. I should have liked it less if I had known that he was demanding that the whole five of us be burnt as a sacrifice to their God.

When he had finished speaking, Queen Sorais addressed him in a soft and musical voice. She seemed to be putting the other side of the question before him.

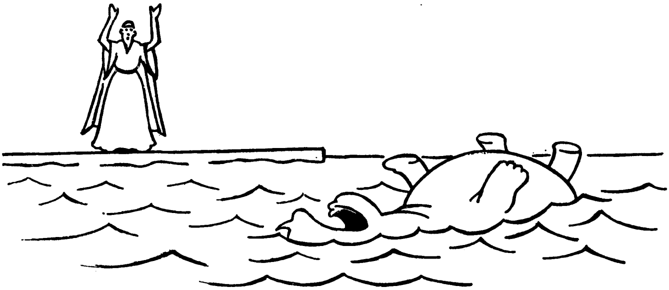
Then Nyleptha spoke. Though we did not know it, she was praying that our lives be spared. She turned and addressed a tall, soldier-like man with a black beard, whose name (as we afterwards learnt) was Nasta. He was the greatest lord of the country and she seemed to be asking him to support her. Indeed, when Sir Henry had caught her eye and she had coloured up, Nasta had noticed it and I had seen a look of anger pass across his face. We learned afterwards that he had hopes of marrying the Queen. So now, when Nyleptha turned to him, he answered her in a cold voice and seemed to be taking the side of the High Priest. As he spoke, Sorais looked at him, with a quiet smile upon her lips, as though she saw right through him and knew well how to deal with him; but Nyleptha grew very angry. Her eyes flashed and she looked lovelier than ever. At last Nyleptha turned to Agon and seemed in part to agree with what he had said, for he bowed. And still Sorais smiled. Then suddenly Nyleptha made a sign; music sounded, and everyone rose to leave the hall, leaving ourselves and the guards.

C. When they were all gone, Nyleptha bent forward and by signs made it clear to us that she was eager to know where we came from.

I had a large pocket-book in my pocket and a pencil. Taking it out, I made a little drawing of a lake; then I drew the underground river and the lake at the other end. Then I advanced to the steps of the throne and gave it to her. She understood it at once and seemed to be delighted. Descending from the throne, she took the book to her sister Sorais, who clearly understood. Next she took the pencil from me and examined it curiously; then proceeded to make a number of delightful little drawings. The first drawing showed herself holding out both hands in welcome and a man very like Sir Henry taking them.

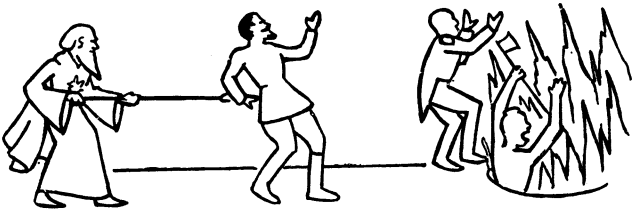


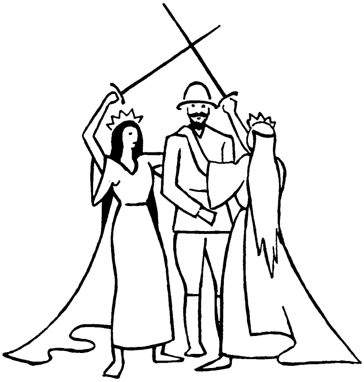
Then she drew a picture of a hippopotamus dying in the water and of Agon, the High Priest, on the bank holding up his hands at the sight.



Then followed a most alarming picture of a great fire and of Agon pushing us into it with a long stick.

This last picture filled me with fear. She nodded sweetly





and began to draw again; the drawing was of a man again very like Sir Henry and of two women whom I recognized as Sorais and herself, each with one arm around him, holding a sword in protection over him.

And then she made a sign to show that she must go. She held out her hand to Sir Henry and he kissed it. At the same time Sorais gave her hand to Good, but while she was doing so, her eyes were fixed upon Sir Henry.

When the Queens had gone, the officer of the guard came forward and led us from the hall. We went some distance to a beautiful set of rooms. There was a sitting-room in the middle, with bedrooms round it. On the table of the sitting-room a meal was set ready and servants waited upon us while we ate, and music played.

At the end of the meal we made signs showing that we wished to sleep. They would have given us a room each, but we made it clear that we wished to sleep in one room. We thought that this would be safer. We told Umslopogaas to sleep outside the door of the room, with his axe by his side. . . .

I was just dropping off to sleep when I was awakened by Good's voice:

" I say, Quatermain! "

" What is it? "

" Did you ever see anything like them? "

" Like what? "

" Her eyes! "

I threw a shoe at him.

Sixteen

THE FLOWER TEMPLE

A. It was half-past eight when I awoke.

I sat up in bed and the first thing I saw was Good's eyeglass fixed on me from the other side of the room.

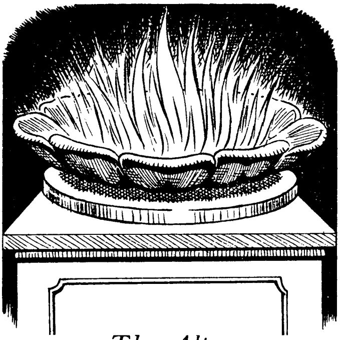
"I say, Quatermain," he began, "did you ever see anything like——"

"Now, look here, Good," I said, "will you just stop that!" Fortunately just at this moment a servant came into the room to lead us to our baths. Having bathed, we returned and dressed, then went to the sitting-room and found breakfast ready for us.

After breakfast we sat about talking and wondering what was going to happen next. After some time the captain of the guard appeared and showed us that we must follow him. We followed, but not without some doubt and fear, for we guessed that the time had come to pay the bill for that hippopotamus and the person to whom we were to pay it would be Agon, the High Priest. Yet I felt some comfort in the promise of protection which the Queens had given us. So off we started, not feeling too happy. We passed through the outer court and came to the great double gates of the palace, which opened on to the wide road which runs up the hill to the Temple of the Sun. The gates were thrown open at our approach and we passed over a bridge and stood gazing upon one of the most splendid roads in the world, one hundred feet from side to side. The houses on either side are not set close together as in European cities, but each house stands in its own garden, and all the houses are beautifully built of red stone. They are the homes of the noblemen and great lords of Milosis, and they stretch away in unbroken lines for a mile or more until the eye reaches the wonderful sight of the Temple of the Sun which crowns the hill.

As we stood gazing upon this, there suddenly dashed up to the gate-way two wooden carriages with two wheels such as the ancient Romans used; each was drawn by two fine horses. Alphonse and I got into the first; Sir Henry, Good and Umslopogaas got into the one behind, and off we went. And we did go! As soon as we were seated, the driver called out and the horses sprang forward and we were carried away at top speed. Poor Alphonse held on to the side of what he called this " devil of a cart," thinking that every moment was his last. After a minute or two, he began to wonder where we were going, and he asked me. I replied that, so far as I knew, we were going to be sacrificed by burning. You should have seen his face when he heard that!

B. And now before us in all its beauty stood the Temple of the Sun—the peculiar pride of the Zu-Vendi people. The building stands by itself in the middle of a great garden on the hill-top, and it is built in the shape of a flower. There is a round hall in the centre and twelve other halls like leaves are built out from it. Each of these smaller halls is named after one of the months. In the middle of the great hall is an altar, on which there burns a steady flame. The altar is made of white stone, covered with gold, and is shaped like the sun. Encircling the altar and enclosing it are twelve great leaves of beaten gold. All night and (except at one hour) all day these leaves are closed over the altar, as a sleeping flower is



The Altar

closed at evening time. But when the sun at mid-day comes through the hole in the centre of the roof and falls upon the golden floor, the leaves open: then music is sounded and a burnt sacrifice is offered to the sun—usually a sheep, or sometimes fruit and corn. Then, as the sunbeam passes from the altar, the leaves are closed again until the next day.

To the north and to the south of the altar are ten golden angels, beautifully shaped, standing with bent heads, their faces covered by their wings. The floor of the great hall is all made of white stone, but on the east of the altar it is made of brass.

Of course the sunbeam does not always fall upon the altar just at twelve by the clock: to-day the sacrifice was to be made at eight minutes past. For some time we waited in the court-yard of the Temple. Then just at twelve a priest appeared and made a sign to the officer of the guard, who made us advance. In a few seconds we entered the great hall and were looking at a sea of human faces stretched away to the farthest edge. All eyes were trying to catch a sight of the strangers who had done this terrible deed—the first strangers who had ever set foot in the country of the Zu-Vendis since the memory of man.

As we appeared, a murmur ran through the crowd, and the whisper of it was repeated up and up into the golden roof above us. We saw a wave of excitement pass over the thousands of faces like a wind passing over a field of corn. We walked down a lane cut through the heart of the human mass till at last we stood upon the brass floor to the east of the altar. Ropes had been stretched round this centre part, so that the crowd stood outside. Inside the circle were the priests in their white garments, holding long golden horns in their hands, and just in front of us was Agon with his curious cap upon his head.

We took our stand upon the floor of brass, little knowing what was prepared for us beneath; but I noticed a strange sound proceeding from the floor: I could not quite understand it.

There came a pause. I looked round to see if there was any sign of the two Queens, Nyleptha and Sorais; they were not there. But to the right of us there was a bare space, which I guessed was kept for them. And then there was a far-off sound of a horn blowing, and there came another murmur and a moving among the crowd.

Seventeen

INTO THE FLAMES

A. There came a murmur among the crowd. Up a long lane leading to the open space on our right, we saw the two Queens walking side by side. Behind them were some noblemen of the court, among whom I recognized the great lord Nasta. Behind these came a company of about fifty guards: I was very glad to see the soldiers. All took their places, the two Queens in front, the noblemen on their right and left, and the guards in a half-circle behind them. Again there was silence.

Nyleptha looked up and caught my eye. It seemed to me that there was a meaning in her look and I watched her carefully. Her eyes travelled down to the brass floor, on the outer edge of which we were standing. Then followed a slight movement of her head to the side. I did not understand it. She repeated the movement of her head; and then I guessed that she meant us to move back off the brass floor. I looked at her again. Yes, I was sure of it. There was danger in standing on that floor.

Sir Henry was on one side of me and Umslopogaas on the other. Keeping my eyes fixed straight in front of me, I whispered to them to draw back slowly, inch by inch, till half their feet were on the stone floor where the brass ceased. Sir Henry whispered the message to Good and Alphonse. Slowly, very very slowly, we all moved backwards; so slowly indeed that nobody except Nyleptha and Sorais seemed to notice the movement.

I looked again at Nyleptha; she gave a very slight nod, showing that she had seen and was satisfied.

All this time Agon's eyes were fixed on the altar before him. Suddenly he threw up his long arms and in a solemn voice began a prayer to "The Father of Life, the Sun, which chases away the darkness." When the prayer was ended, he paused a moment and then looked up towards the round hole in the roof and cried:

"O Sun, descend upon thine altar!"

B. As he spoke, a wonderful and beautiful thing happened. Down from above flashed a splendid living beam of light, cutting through the darkness like a sword of fire. Full upon the closed leaves of the altar it fell and ran glimmering down their golden sides; and then the flower opened at the touch of the light. Slowly it opened and, as the great leaves fell wide, the golden altar was seen on which the fire ever burns. The priests blew their golden horns, and from all the people there arose a shout of praise which rang through the building. And now that the flower-altar was open, the sunlight fell upon the tongue of flame and it disappeared in the greater glory. As it disappeared, the music rolled out once more. Again the old priest threw up his arms and called aloud: "We sacrifice to thee, O Sun!"

Once more I caught Nyleptha's eye. It was fixed upon the brass floor.

"Look out!" I said aloud; and, as I said it, I saw Agon bend forward and touch something on the altar. As he did so, a great deep breath went up, and a great sigh came from every throat in the building.

Nyleptha leant forward, and covered her eyes with her hands. Sorais turned and whispered to the officer of the royal guard. With a sound like thunder the whole of the brass floor slipped away from in front of us, and there in its place we saw a smooth sloping hole, which ended in a most terrible fire beneath the altar, a fire big enough and hot enough to melt a battle-ship.

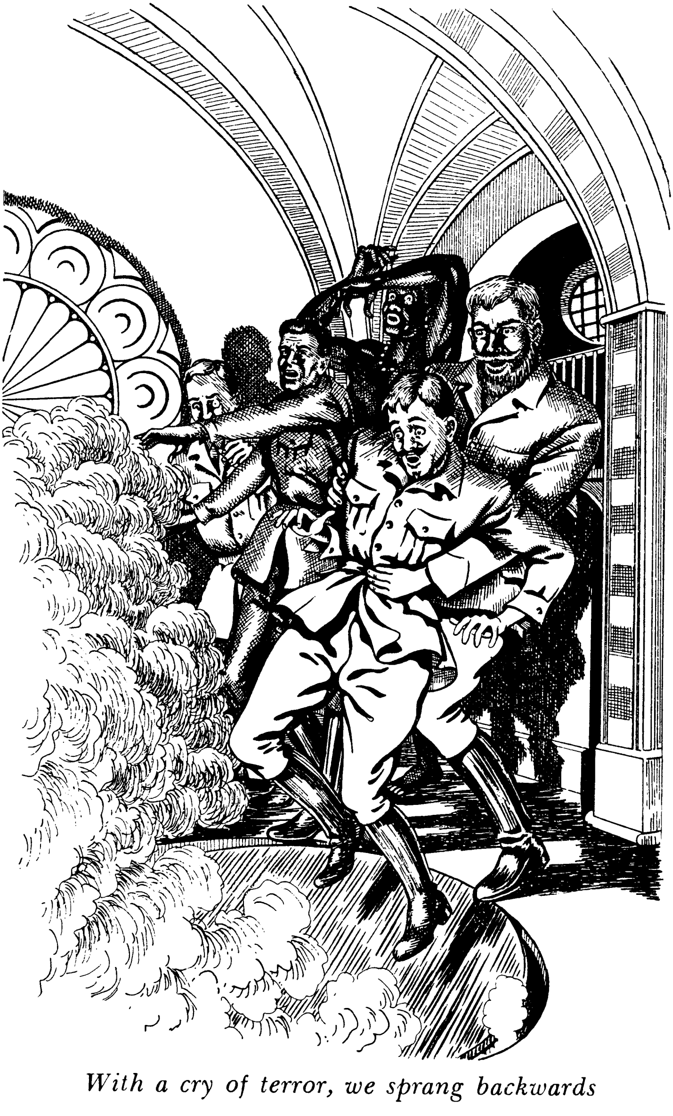
With a cry of terror, we sprang backwards—all except poor Alphonse who was too frightened to move, but Sir Henry caught him in his strong hands just as he was slipping down, and dragged him back.

C. Instantly there arose a most fearful noise, and things looked dangerous indeed. We four got back to back, Alphonse hiding among our legs. We had our pistols with us, for, although our guns had been taken away from us when we left the palace, of course these people did not know what a pistol was. Umslopogaas had his battle-axe, for no one had dared to take that away from him, and now he swung it round his head and sent his Zulu war-cry ringing around the walls.

A moment later the priests had drawn swords from beneath their white garments and were leaping upon us like dogs upon a hunted deer. I saw that we must act at once or be lost. As the first man came rushing forward—a great tall fellow he was—I sent a heavy pistol shot through him. He fell into the opening at our feet and, with a fearful cry, slipped down into the fire which had been prepared for us.

The other priests stopped. Perhaps it was surprise at the effect of our pistols, or perhaps it was the thought of the terrible fate of their companion which made them pause.

Before they could come on again, Sorais called out something, and the soldiers formed a great ring round us and the Queens and the noblemen. It was done in a moment, and still the priests paused, and the people waited making no sign one way or the other. Which way would the people turn—against us or for us?



With a cry of terror, we sprang backwards

The last cry of the burning priest had died away; the fire had finished him. A great silence fell upon the place.

Then the High Priest Agon turned, and his face was as the face of a devil.

" Let the sacrifice be sacrificed," he cried to the Queens. " Has not evil enough been done already by these strangers, and would you as Queens throw the garment of protection over evil-doers? Is not a holy beast of the Sun dead? and is not a priest of the Sun also dead, slain by the magic of these strangers who come we know not whence, and we know not what they are? Be warned, O Queens, and do not go against the will of the God! There is a power that is more than your power; there is a justice that is higher than your justice. Lift not your hand against it! Let the sacrifice be sacrificed, O Queens! "

Then Sorais answered; her voice was deep and quiet, and yet it seemed to me that in her heart she was laughing at Agon.

" O Agon," she said, " you have spoken according to your desire, and you have spoken the truth. But is it not you who are lifting a hand against the justice of your God, for behold, the mid-day sacrifice has been sacrificed; the Sun has claimed his priest as a sacrifice."

This was a new idea and it pleased the people. They shouted their agreement.

D. " Think," continued Sorais; " what are these men? They are strangers who were found floating upon the lake. Who brought them there? How did they come there? How do you know that they also are not servants of the Sun? We are their hosts and they are our guests. Is this the way in which our nation treats its guests—to throw them to the flames? Shame on you! A host should receive the stranger and show him favour. He should bind up his wounds and find him a bed on which he may lie down, and give him food to eat; but the bed which you give is a great fire, and the food is the hot smell of the flames. Shame on you, I say! "

She paused a little to watch the effect of her speech upon the people. It was clear that they were on her side; so, changing her manner, she cried out in a commanding voice, "Ho! Give place! Make way for the Queens and those whom the Queens cover with the garment of their protection! "

"And if I refuse, O Queen?" said Agon between his teeth.

"Then I will cut a path with my guards," was the proud answer. "I will cut a path, even through the bodies of your priests."

Agon was mad with anger. He looked at the people as if he were going to speak to them, but he saw clearly that they were not on his side.

And then Nyleptha spoke in her soft, sweet voice.

"Remember, Agon," she said, "that these men may also be servants of the Sun, as my sister, the Queen, has said. They cannot speak for themselves, for they do not know our language. Therefore let the matter wait until such time as they have learned our language. Who can be judged without hearing? When these men can speak for themselves, then it will be time to put them to the proof."

This was a useful way of escape, and the angry old priest took it—though he did not like it.

"So be it, O Queens," he said. "Let the men go in peace and when they have learnt our tongue, then let them speak."

In another minute, we were marching out of the Temple with the royal soldiers guarding us on either side.

Eighteen

THE SONG OF SORAIS

A. After our escape from Agon and the priests, we returned to our rooms in the palace and had a very pleasant time. The two Queens and the noblemen and the people did everything possible for our comfort and happiness. Every day people came to visit us. They examined our guns, our clothes, our shirt of mail[1], even our pens and pencils, and they were especially interested in a small clock which I had.

One day six men came to see us and, as was his custom, Good put on his full dress as a Sea Captain. These men seemed to be of rather a different class from those who usually came to see us. They were very polite, almost too polite, and they seemed to be more interested in Good's clothes (of which they took many notes and measurements) than in ourselves. At the time Good was very pleased by having so much notice taken of his appearance; but he did not know that he was dealing with the six chief sellers of men's clothing in the town. Some days later at a great dinner at the palace we had the pleasure of seeing some seven or eight Zu-Vendi youths dressed in all the glory of English sea captains—or as near to it as they could get. Good was very angry, and after this we decided to dress ourselves in the clothes of the country. But nothing would make Umslopogaas change; he went about dressed as before in a waist-cloth and a battle-axe.

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[1] See *King Solomon's Mines,* Chapter X c. These chain-shirts were given to Allan Quatermain, Sir Henry and Good by the King of Kukuanaland.

All this time we had been busily studying the language, and had got on quite fast. Every morning we worked at the language until noon, and then in the afternoon we enjoyed ourselves, riding or hunting, or visiting places of interest. On most evenings we went to supper with the Queens. We did not go every night, of course, but about three or four times a week, whenever they were free. And I must say that these little suppers were quite the most charming things of their sort that I have ever experienced. How true is the saying that the very highest in rank are always the most simple and kindly. It is the "half-and-half" sort of people, the "new rich," who are proud and stiff—and rude. I really think that Nyleptha's greatest charm is in her sweet simple manner and her real and kindly interest, even in little things. She is the simplest woman I ever knew, and her nature one of the sweetest.

B. Three months passed by in this way. We were now able to speak the language quite well and easily and we were certainly enjoying this life very much; but, during these three months, I had myself become more and more anxious, more and more sure that trouble, serious trouble, lay in front of us. For, to say it plainly, it had become daily more clear to me that Sir Henry and Queen Nyleptha were falling in love with each other, and it was clear too that all was not well with Queen Sorais. While we talked at our evening suppers, Sorais would sit there in her great chair and look at us and read us all like a book. Only from time to time would she say a few words, or smile that quick dangerous smile of hers which was like the flashes upon a dark storm-cloud. Good would always sit as near to Sorais as he dared, gazing at her through his eye-glass, for he really admired her deeply. To Good Queen Sorais appeared to be perfection; to me she appeared to be a terrible danger. I watched her keenly and I soon found out that, in spite of the seeming calmness on her face, her heart was full of a fierce love for Sir

Henry and of a growing hatred of her sister, whom he seemed to prefer. Of course I could not be sure of this; it is not easy to read so cold and proud a woman; but I noticed one or two little things. Little bits of dry grass tell an elephant-hunter which way the wind is blowing: I have been a hunter all my life, and I can read the little signs and traces which others do not observe. The sky in our lives seemed blue enough, but there was this cloud upon it;—and another cloud, a big one, was appearing far away.

We had heard no more about that hippopotamus, but this did not mean that the matter was forgotten or that Agon was our friend. Far from it! He hated us more than ever before. Until our coming the priests had been the wise men of the land, the men who knew everything; but now we had arrived, bringing with us wonderful things of which the priests had never heard, and possessing knowledge which they did not possess; and the formerly complete faith of the noblemen in their powers had clearly been shaken. Added to this was the favour shown to us by the Queens, who now asked our advice on almost all matters of government, where before they had turned to the priests. Indeed, Agon and his fellow priests had every reason to hate us. This was our second danger.

Our third danger was the rising hatred of the great lords, headed by Nasta. For some years, Nasta had hoped to become Nyleptha's husband. Now all this was changed. Nyleptha smiled no more in his direction and he was not slow to guess the cause. Angered and alarmed, he turned to Sorais, only to find that he might as well try to court a mountain-side. She laughed at his change of heart, and took little notice of him. So then Nasta thought of the thirty thousand wild swordsmen who, at his command, would pour over the northern mountains, and would be quite willing to hang our heads on the gates of Milosis.

But first he decided to make one more attempt and to demand the hand of Nyleptha at the great meeting of the Court held every year when the Queens set their names to all the laws passed during the last twelve months. It was Nyleptha herself who told us of this.

C. We were sitting at supper on the evening before this great meeting. She pretended to think little of the news and to take it lightly—but her voice was not steady. Sir Henry was clearly alarmed, and could not hide his fears.

" And what answer will the Queen be pleased to give to the lord? " I asked, as lightly as I could.

" What answer? " she repeated. " I do not know. What is a poor woman to do when the man who is courting her has thirty thousand soldiers with which to urge his love? " She turned her clear gaze upon Sir Henry.

Just then we rose from the table to go into another room.

" Quatermain, a word, quick! " said Sir Henry to me. " Listen: I have never spoken to you about it, but you must have guessed that I love Nyleptha. What am I to do? "

Fortunately I had already thought over the question and I was, therefore, able to give an answer which seemed wisest to me. " You must speak to Nyleptha to-night. Now is your time—now or never. Listen—in the sitting-room get near her and whisper to her, asking her to meet you at midnight by the figure of Rademas at the end of the great hall. I will keep watch for you there. It must be now or never, Curtis."

We passed on into the other room. Nyleptha was sitting with her hands before her, and a sad and anxious look was upon her lovely face. A little way off sat Sorais, talking to Good in her slow, quiet voice.

Time went on; in another quarter of an hour I knew that, according to their custom, the Queens would retire. As yet Sir Henry had had no chance of saying a word to her. Indeed, though he saw so much of the royal sisters, it was not at all easy to see them alone. What was to be done? I tried to think—and at last an idea came to me.

I bowed low before Sorais. "Will the Queen Sorais be pleased to sing to us?" I said. "Our hearts are heavy to-night."

D. "My songs are not such as to lighten a heavy heart," answered Sorais, "but I will sing if it pleases you."

She rose and went a few steps to a table on which lay a small harp. She took it and touched the strings lightly with her fingers.

Then suddenly her lovely voice rang out, like the voice of some deep-throated bird, in a song so wildly sweet and yet so sad and strange, that it made one's blood stand still. Up and up rose the golden voice; it seemed to melt far away, and then to grow again and travel on, bearing upon its breast all the sorrow of the world and all the despair of lost souls. It was a wonderful song. I could not listen to it properly at that time, but I got the words of it afterwards:—

As a bird through the darkness winging
Flies in where our lamp burns bright,
And rests for a moment among us,
Then turns back into the night;
So is our life—in the darkness
One moment's glimmer of light.

As a bird on the wings of music
Mounts up in the sunlit sky,
Then struck by the shot of the hunter
Falls back upon earth to die;
So is love but a moment's gladness,
A smile that fades into a sigh.

As a storm-wind of summer, tearing,
Scatters the flowers with its breath,
So the sword of power passes o'er[1] *us,*
And its track is blood and death.

Autumn follows on summer,
And the trees are stripped again;
So Power takes from Power its harvest—
A harvest of tears and pain:
And Death is the only victor;
Death counts up his gain.

As she began the second verse, I turned and whispered to Sir Henry: "Now, Curtis, now." And I turned my back.

"Nyleptha," he said, "Nyleptha, I must speak with you to-night; upon my life I must. I pray you to meet me."

"How can I speak with you?" she answered, looking straight in front of her. "Queens are not like other people. I am never alone; I am always watched."

"Listen, Nyleptha, I will be near the figure of Rademas in the great hall at midnight. I know the pass-word and the soldier will let me through. Quatermain will be there to keep watch, and with him the Zulu. Will you come, my Queen?"

"It is not right or proper," she murmured, "and to-morrow——"

Just then the music ended and Sorais slowly turned round.

"I will be there," said Nyleptha hurriedly.

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[1] O(v)er. Victor (last verse) = one who gains a victory.

Nineteen

MIDNIGHT

A. It was night—dead night, and silence lay upon the city like a cloud.

Secretly as evil-doers, Sir Henry Curtis, Umslopogaas and I made our way towards the entrance of the great hall. We were stopped by one of the guards: I gave the password, and the man lowered his spear and let us go on.

We reached the hall safely. So empty, and so still was it that, even when we had passed, the sound of our footsteps still whispered up in the roof like the footsteps of dead men moving quietly around us. I felt my heart sink; it was all so silent and so strange.

The moon was full, and threw great beams of light through the high openings in the walls, and little lakes of silver lay pure and beautiful on the blackness of the floor. One of these silver beams fell upon the figure of the sleeping Rademas and on the angel-form bent over him, bathing it in a soft, clear light.

Here we stood and waited—Sir Henry and I close together, Umslopogaas a little distance off in the darkness, so that I could only just see his towering form leaning upon his axe.

We waited so long that I almost fell asleep. At last I heard Curtis give a quick catching breath. Then, from far away, came a little sound, a faint moving in the darkness. Near it came and nearer yet. We could see a figure passing from shadow to shadow, and even hear the soft fall of feet. Then I saw Umslopogaas raise his arm in silent greeting, and Nyleptha was before us. Oh, how beautiful she looked as she paused a moment just within the circle of the moonlight! She stood with her hand pressed upon her heart, proud and yet half-doubtful—a queen and yet so sweet. In that moment I fell in love with her myself, and remain so till this hour.

"I have come," she whispered, "but it was a great risk. You know how I am watched—Sorais watches me with those great eyes of hers; even my guards are spies upon me; Nasta watches me too. Oh, let him be careful!—or instead of giving him my hand, I will take his head." She gave a little laugh and then went on: "You asked me to come here, my lord Incubu." (Curtis had taught her to call him so.) "No doubt it is about some business of government, for I know you are always full of great plans to help my people." Again she gave a gentle laugh and looked at him questioning.

At this point I thought it wise to move away, but I could not help hearing in that silence much of what was said.

B. "You know, Nyleptha," said Sir Henry, "that it was not for such things that I asked you to meet me here and at this hour. Listen to me, Nyleptha; I love you."

As he said the words, I saw a great and wonderful change pass over her face. The laughter went out of it, and in its place there shone a great light which seemed to touch it with glory and make it like the face of the great stone angel above us. I could not help thinking that, whoever made that angel, had eyes which saw into the future and had drawn there in stone the face of a queen as yet unborn.

There was a silence as of unspoken music, as the breathless hush that comes before the birds sing in the dawn.

Slowly Nyleptha raised her head and fixed her eyes, all alight with the glory of her love, full upon his face as though to read his secret soul. Then at last she spoke, low indeed, but clearly as a silver bell.

"O man, who has wandered here from far away, to steal my heart and make it all your own, I put my hand upon your hand, and kiss you on the forehead; and now by my hand, and by that first holy kiss, and by the throne which I may lose for you, by the Great Black Stone, and by the everlasting glory of the Sun, I vow that I will live and die for you and will love you and you only until death, and in the world of After-Death; and your will shall be my will, and your ways my ways."

I moved farther away to where Umslopogaas was standing. I found him looking at the scene in the moonlight with a smile. "O Macumazahn, I suppose it is because I am getting old, but I do not think I shall ever learn to understand the ways of white people. Look there now! What is all the talk about, Macumazahn? He wants a wife, and she wants a husband—then why doesn't he pay his cows down like a man[1] and get the business done? It would save a lot of trouble and we should get our night's sleep, but there they go on—talk, talk, talk. . . ."

After a little time Curtis and Nyleptha came towards us. She took my hand, and said that I was "her lord's dear friend" and therefore most dear to her. Next she lifted Umslopogaas's axe and examined it, saying carelessly, as she did so, that he might have cause to use it soon.

After that she nodded prettily to us all, cast one tender look upon her lover, and slipped away into the darkness.

We got back to our room without difficulty.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Curtis, as we reached the door.

"I am wondering," I answered, "how many brave men's lives this night's work will cost."

We told Good, and he was delighted at the news. We warned him most seriously to keep it secret, especially from Sorais.

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[1] Umslopogaas is thinking of the custom of paying for a wife with cows (as money), as in his own country.

Twenty

NASTA SPEAKS

A. That morning we were again present in the great hall and I could not help smiling to myself when I thought of our visit the night before. If walls could speak, they would have strange tales to tell.

How wonderfully women can act a part! There, high up on her golden throne, sat Nyleptha; and, when Sir Henry came in a little late, dressed as an officer of her guard, and bowed to her, she merely greeted him with a careless nod, and turned her head coldly aside. There was a very large gathering of people at the court: there were always large numbers present at the reading of the laws, but there were more than usual this time, for many had heard tell that Nasta was going to ask publicly for the hand of Nyleptha in marriage. I saw all the priests there and at their head, Agon, who regarded us with an angry eye. There were also many noblemen, each with a band of brightly dressed followers. And there was Nasta, stroking his black beard thoughtfully, and looking even more unpleasant than usual.

The officer read out each law and then gave it into the hands of the Queens; then music sounded, and the Queens' guard lowered their spears. This reading of the laws took a long time. At last it came to an end. The last law was one about "certain strangers" and it proceeded to make all three of us "noblemen of the land and officers in the Queens' army". When the music sounded and the spears were lowered as usual, I saw some of the lords turn and whisper to each other, while Nasta bit his finger-nails. They did not like the favour shown to us, which was perhaps not unnatural.

Then came a pause. Nasta stepped forward, bowed to Queen Nyleptha and asked if he might speak.

Nyleptha looked a little anxious, but she bowed to him and asked the " well-loved lord " to speak on; and in a few straight words he asked her hand in marriage.

Then, before she had time to answer, the High Priest, Agon, began to make a fine speech; he pointed out how excellent the marriage would be; that it would unite the kingdom, for Nasta's land (of which he was really king) was to the Zu-Vendis much as Scotland used to be to England. He said that it would please the people of the mountains and also the army, for Nasta was famous as a soldier. He went on to say the Sun God would bless the marriage. . . .

It was interesting to watch Nyleptha's face while Agon spoke; she smiled indeed, but beneath the smile her face was set like a stone, and her eyes began to flash dangerously.

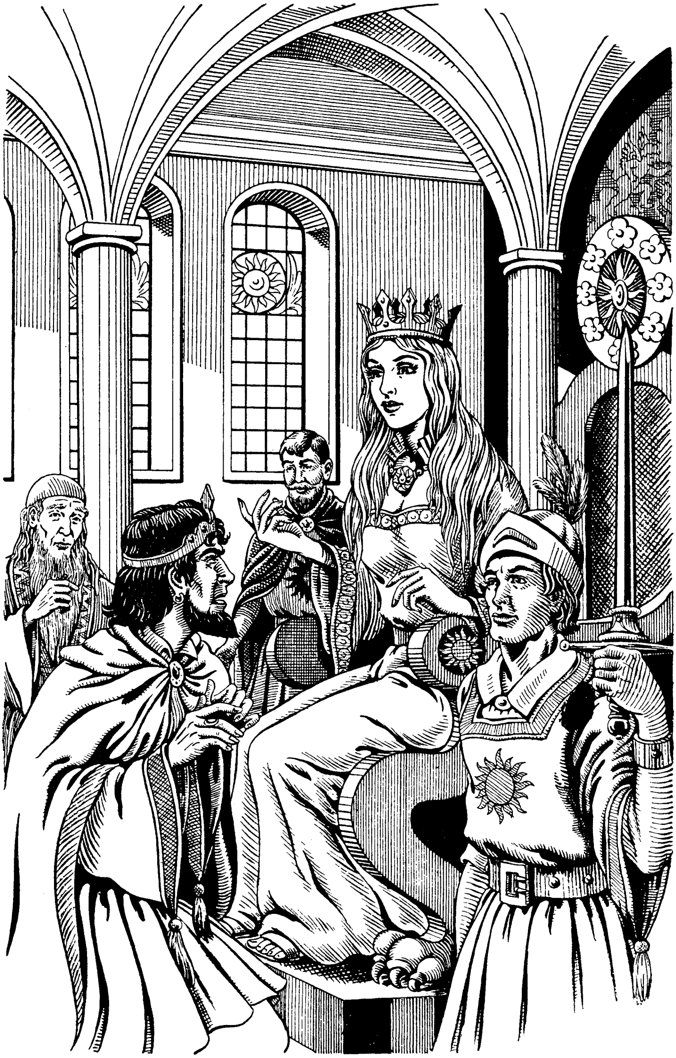
B. At last Agon stopped speaking and Nyleptha prepared herself to answer. Before she did so, Sorais leant towards her and said in a voice loud enough for me to hear what was said: " Consider well, my sister, before you speak, for I think that our thrones may depend upon your words."

Nyleptha made no answer, and with a smile Sorais leant back again and listened.

" Indeed," said Queen Nyleptha, " a great honour has been done to me. It was an honour, that my hand should have been asked in marriage; and it was an honour that Agon should be so swift to give the blessing of the Sun to the union. I thank you, Nasta, and I will carefully consider your words; but at the present time I have no wish for marriage. Again, I thank you, Nasta."

The great lord's face was almost as black as his beard, for he knew that he had been refused once and for ever.

" I thank the Queen for her kind words," he said, hold-



"Again, I thank you, Nasta"

ing himself in with difficulty and looking anything but thankful; " I shall treasure them in my heart. And now I ask another favour; I ask the Queen to allow me to retire to my own poor cities in the north until such time as the Queen is able to say ' Yes ' or ' No ' to my prayer. Perhaps," he added in an unpleasant voice, " the Queen will be pleased to visit me there and to bring with her these stranger lords," and he looked darkly towards us. " It is a poor country and rough, but we are a strong race of mountain-dwellers, and there shall be gathered thirty thousand swordsmen to greet the Queen."

This speech was received in complete silence: he had declared war. But Nyleptha answered him with spirit.

" Certainly, Nasta, I will come, and these stranger lords shall come with me, and for every man of your mountain-dwellers who calls you Prince, I will bring from the lowlands two who call me Queen, and we shall see which are the finer and stronger men. We shall meet again."

Music sounded and the Queens rose. The Court broke up in excited murmuring.

I went home with a heavy heart, for war was now certain. . . .

After this there was quiet for a few weeks. Curtis and the Queen did not often meet, and were very careful not to allow their secret to be known. Yet, in spite of this, whispers went round from lip to lip, and the whispers became louder and louder as the days passed by.

Twenty-One

THE STORM BREAKS

A. And now the cloud of trouble began to show very black and big upon our horizon; and that trouble was the love of Sorais for Sir Henry. I saw the storm drawing nearer and nearer; and so, poor fellow, did he.

At last the evil moment came—as I saw it must come. One day Good had gone out hunting, and Sir Henry and I were sitting quietly talking, when a message arrived:—

"The Queen Sorais commands Lord Incubu to see her immediately in her own room."

"Oh my word!" cried Sir Henry, "can't you go instead, old fellow?"

"No! Not for anything!" I answered. "I would rather face a wounded elephant with my bare hands. Take care of your own business, my friend. I would not be in your place for anything!"

"I feel like a school-boy going to the head-master to be beaten. I hope she won't put a knife into me—though I well believe she might." And off he started with a very faint heart.

I sat and waited, and at the end of about forty minutes he returned looking a great deal worse than when he went.

"Give me something to drink," he said.

I got him a cup of wine, and asked what was the matter.

"What's the matter?" he answered. "Why, if ever there was trouble, there's trouble now. I was shown straight into Sorais' room, and there she sat alone, playing gently upon her harp. I stood before her, and for a time she took no notice of me but kept on playing. At last she looked up and smiled. 'So you have come,' she said. 'I thought perhaps you had gone on some of Queen Nyleptha's business.' To this I merely bowed.

"'I wish to talk to you,' she said. 'Be seated;' and she made room for me beside her. 'Incubu,' she said, 'do you love power?' I answered that I supposed all men loved power of one sort or another. 'You shall have it,' she said. 'Do you love wealth? You shall have it; and do you love beauty?'

"I do not know what I answered, for by this time I was shaking like a leaf. I knew that something dreadful was going to happen.

"'Incubu,' she said, 'do you wish to be King? Shall I make you King of the Zu-Vendis and husband of Queen Sorais, Lady of the Night? No, do not speak. Listen to me. To no man among my people have I ever before opened my secret heart; but you are a stranger, and therefore I speak without shame. See, the crown lies at your feet, my Lord Incubu, and with it a woman whom some have thought beautiful! Now you may answer, O my chosen, and softly shall your words fall upon my ears.'

"'O Sorais,' I said, 'I beg you not to speak thus. For this thing cannot be. I am promised to your sister Nyleptha, and I love her and her alone.'

"I knew that I had said a dreadful thing. I looked up to see the result. Sorais slowly raised her head, and I drew back in terror. Her face was white and her eyes were flames. She rose to her feet and seemed to be breathless, unable to speak. The terrible thing was that she was so quiet about it. Once she looked at a side table on which lay a great knife; she looked from it to me, as though she thought of killing me. And then at last she spoke one word and one only—'*Go!*'

"Give me another cup of wine and tell me what are we to do."

B. I shook my head, for the matter was indeed serious.

"Nyleptha must be told of this at once," I said.

"Perhaps I had better tell her. Who is the captain of her guard to-night?"

"It's Good."

"Oh, then there will be no danger of her being attacked or murdered. Don't look surprised. I think her sister would murder her if she got the chance. I suppose I ought to tell Good what has happened, but I don't think so. It would hurt his feelings, poor fellow. You see, he is a great admirer of Sorais."

"That's true; and, after all, there is not much to tell him. He will find out the truth soon enough. But I'll tell you what will happen: Sorais will join up with Nasta and there will be a war such as has not been known in this country for hundreds of years. Look there! " I pointed to two men hurrying away from the door of Sorais' rooms. "Now follow me."

I ran up some stairs into a tower that rose from the roof above our room. I took the spy-glass with me, and looked out over the palace wall. The first thing I saw was one of those men running away towards the Temple bearing, without a doubt, a message to the High Priest Agon. Then I searched for the other, and soon I spied a horseman riding very quickly from the nearest gate of the city—going to Nasta. " Oh," I said, " Sorais is a woman of spirit. She is acting at once and will strike quick and hard. You have wounded her feelings, my boy, and men's blood will flow in rivers to pay for that—and your blood will flow too if she can get hold of us. Well, I will go to Nyleptha. Just stop where you are and try to calm yourself. You'll need to keep calm, I can tell you.' And off I went.

C. I reached the Queen without trouble. She was expecting Curtis, and was not very pleased to see me instead.

"Is there anything wrong with my lord? Why does he not come to me? Is he sick? " she asked.

I said that he was well enough, and then without delay I began my story, and told her everything. How angry she was! It was a wonderful sight; she looked so lovely.

" How dare you come to me with such a tale! You say my lord was making love to Sorais! It is a lie! "

" Pardon me, O Queen," I answered; " I said Sorais was making love to *him*."

"Isn't that the same thing?—Sorais! I hate her, though she is my sister."

"Nyleptha," I said, "you know that your words are foolish; and there is no time for foolishness."

"How dare you speak to me like that!" she broke in.

"Listen!" I said; "the moments which you are wasting in anger may cost you your crown and all of us our lives. Already the horsemen of Sorais are going forth to call men to arms. In three days Nasta will begin to make ready in the mountains, and the flag of Sorais will be carried from range to range and from valley to valley. Soldiers will spring up in its track like dust beneath a storm-wind. Half the army will join her, and in every town and village of this wide land the priests will cry out against the foreigner."

Nyleptha was quite calm now; her anger had passed. She was now a Queen and a woman of business; the change was sudden, but entire.

"You think that my sister Sorais would make war upon me? So be it; but she will not win. I too have my friends and followers. I will break her spirit and scatter her armies. Give me that pen. Now call the officer from the next room; he may be trusted."

The officer entered, a quiet-looking gentleman of the Court, named Kara.

"Take this paper," said Nyleptha; "on it are my orders. You will guard every door of the rooms of my sister Sorais. Let no one go in and no one come out."

The man looked surprised, but he merely said, "It shall be done," and went out.

D. Then Nyleptha sent for Sir Henry. Just after he arrived, the officer returned and reported that Sorais was gone. It was said that she had gone to the Temple. We looked at each other: things had begun early.

Then we set to work.

Officers who could be trusted were sent for, and they were ordered to gather their men at once. Messages were sent to the powerful lords whom Nyleptha could trust, and several of them left that same day for distant parts of the country to gather their men. Orders were sent to the rulers of far-off cities, and twenty horsemen bearing them left the city that night. Spies were set to work.

All the afternoon and evening we laboured, helped by a few officers whom we could trust. Nyleptha showed a quickness and strength of mind which surprised me.

It was eight o'clock before we got back to our rooms. Good had come back from hunting and had gone on duty with the guard. As we had no reason to fear any immediate danger, we did not think it necessary to go and look for him and tell him what had happened, so we had dinner quickly and went to bed. But, before we did so, Curtis told Umslopogaas to keep watch round Nyleptha's rooms. Without a word the Zulu took up his axe and departed; and we also departed to bed.

Twenty-Two

MURDER BY NIGHT

A. I seemed to have been asleep for only a few minutes when I was awakened by a peculiar feeling. I felt that somebody was in the room and looking at me. I sat up and saw, to my surprise, that it was already dawn and there, standing at the foot of my bed, in the grey light, was Umslopogaas.

"How long have you been there?" I asked, for it is not pleasant to be awakened in such a way.

"For about half an hour, Macumazahn. I have a word for you."

"Speak on," I said, now fully awake.

"As ordered, I went last night to the place of the white Queen and hid myself near the door of the outer room, beyond which is the sleeping place of the Queen. Bougwan (Good) was in the hall alone; and outside the curtain was a guard; but I made my way past both of them. There I waited for many hours. Then suddenly I saw a dark figure coming secretly towards me. It was the figure of a woman, and in her hand she held a knife. Behind her crept someone else. It was Bougwan, following in her tracks. His shoes were off, and for so fat a man, he followed very well. The woman passed me and the star-light shone upon her face. It was the Lady of the Night, Sorais. I waited; then I followed; and so we went slowly and without a sound up the length of the room—first the woman, then Bougwan, and then I. At last the Lady of the Night came to the curtains that shut off the sleeping place of the White Queen. She passed through, and so did Bougwan, and so did I. At the far end of the room is the bed of the Queen, and on it she lay, asleep. I could hear her breathe. The Lady of the Night bent herself thus . . . and, with the long knife lifted, crept towards the bed. So straight did she gaze that she never thought to look behind her. When she was quite close, Bougwan touched her on the arm. She caught her breath and turned, and I saw the knife flash and heard it strike. Bougwan had on his shirt of mail. Then for the first time he saw who the woman was, and without a word he fell back so surprised that he was unable to speak. In a moment she had passed through the curtain. So close did she pass to me that her dress touched me, and I thought of slaying her as she went. Bougwan came running after her, but when we came to the other side of the curtain—she was gone."

"Gone! " I cried.

"Yes, gone, and there stood Bougwan, gazing at the wall. She must have gone through some secret door."

"Are you sure, Umslopogaas," I said, "that you have not dreamt this? "

In reply he opened his left hand and showed about three inches of the blade of the knife. "See what the dream left with me," he said. "The knife broke upon Bougwan's breast, and I picked this up in the sleeping place of the White Queen."

Twenty-Three

WAR! RED WAR!

A. The next day there was a meeting of the Court. Questions of money were to be talked about. When we entered the hall, Nyleptha was already on her throne and was proceeding with business as usual. All around her were noblemen, government officers, priests, and an unusually strong guard.

It was easy to see from the excitement on the faces of everybody present that no one was thinking much of the business. All knew that the country was on the edge of war. We went to our places, and for a little time things went on as usual. Then suddenly we heard a noise outside and the shouting of a great crowd rising to a roar, "Sorais! Sorais!" The great curtains at the end of the hall were drawn wide and through them entered the Lady of the Night herself. Nor did she come alone. In front of her was Agon, the High Priest, and on either side were other priests. Behind her were a number of great lords, and behind them a small company of guards. One look at Sorais was enough to show that she had not come there on any message of peace, for, instead of her usual white garment, she wore a shining shirt of mail, and in her hand she carried a silver spear. She stopped at the great Black Stone and laid her hand on it. Then cried out with a loud voice to Nyleptha on the throne, "Greetings, O Queen!"

"Greetings, my royal sister!" answered Nyleptha. "Draw near. Fear not; you shall not be harmed."

Sorais answered with a proud look, and came on up the hall till she stood in front of the thrones. " Greetings, O Queen! " she said again. " I ask you one question and you shall give the answer to me and to the people of Zu-Vendis. Are you or are you not intending to take this foreign wolf as your husband and to share your throne? " She pointed at Sir Henry with her spear.

Curtis turned to Sorais and said in a loud voice, " Yesterday you had other names than 'wolf' to call me by, O Queen."

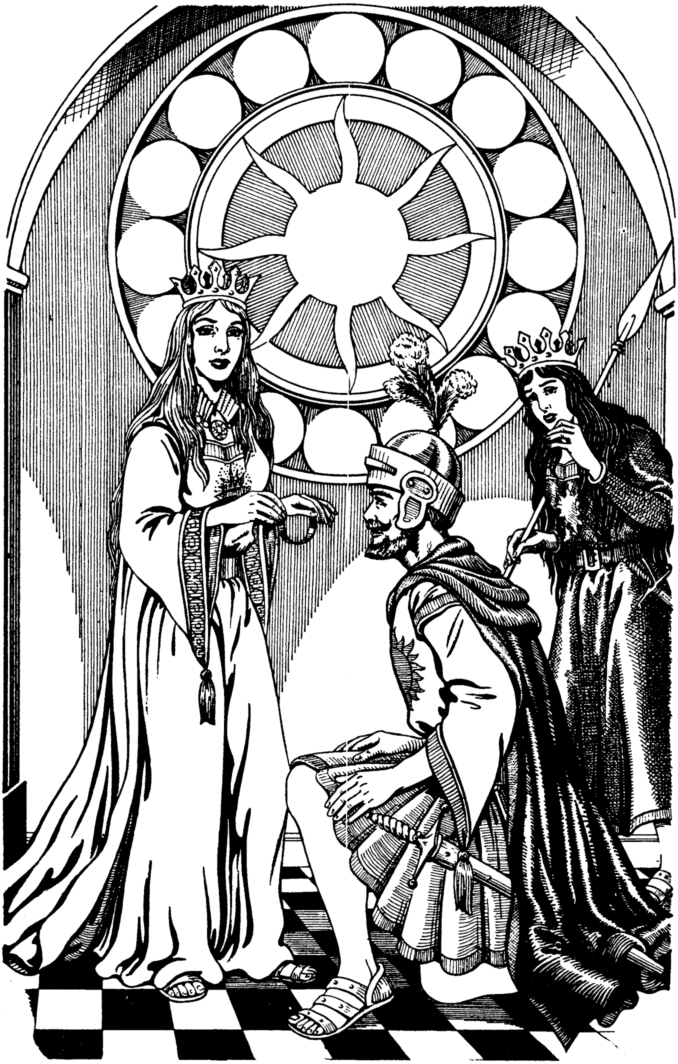
Nyleptha saw that the secret was out, and she answered the question in her own way.

Up she rose, and, descending from the throne, moved in all the glory of her royal grace to where her lover stood. There she stopped, and took off the golden band that was around her arm. Then she told him to kneel, and he dropped on one knee before her. Taking the golden band with both her hands she bent it round his neck, and then she kissed him on the forehead, and called him her " dear lord ".

Then, turning, she said, " My Sister, Lords, Priests and People who are gathered together, by this sign do I take him to be my husband, here in face of you all. Am not I a Queen, free to choose the man whom I will love? He has won my heart, and with it goes my hand and my throne and all that I have. If he had been the poorest man in my kingdom, I would have done the same; but he is a great lord, fairer and stronger than any here, and having more wisdom and knowledge of strange things. Why then should I not choose him? "

She took his hand and gazed proudly on him, and holding it, stood there, boldly facing the people. And such was her sweetness and the power of beauty of her, so sure was she of him and herself, so ready to risk all things and to suffer all things for him, that most of those who saw the sight caught the fire from her eyes and shouted and cheered her wildly.

It was a bold stroke for her to make, but it touched the



Then she told him to kneel . . .

people's hearts, for all the world loves a lover and most of all a love which is brave and unafraid. The people cheered till the roof rang.

B. Sorais stood there, with downcast eyes. Her face was white and she shook with anger. I think I have somewhere said of her that she made me think of the sea on a calm day, having the same look of sleeping power about her. Well, that power was all awake now and her face had the wonder and madness of a stormy ocean.

She lifted her white face; the teeth were set and there were dark rings beneath her burning eyes. Three times she tried to speak, and failed; but at last her voice came. Raising her silver spear, she shook it. The light fell upon it and upon her mail-covered breast.

" Do you think, Nyleptha," she said in a voice that rang through the hall, " do you think that I, Sorais, Queen of Zu-Vendis, will let this base foreigner sit upon my father's throne or allow his children to become kings of our country? Never! Never! while there is life in my body and a man to follow and a spear to strike with! Who is on my side? . . . Now give me this foreign wolf and those who came with him, so that I may send them to the punishment of fire, for they have done evil against the Sun—or else I give you War—Red War. The path of your love shall be marked by the blazing of your town and watered with the blood of those who follow you. On your head shall the blame of the deed rest, and in your ears shall ring the cries of the dying and of those left husbandless and fatherless for ever. I will tear you from your throne and you shall be cast from the top of the great Stair down to the foot of it, for you have covered the name of Rademas with shame. You Bougwan, I will save, if you will leave these men and follow me." (Good shook his head: " Can't be done," he said in English.) " You others I will hang alive upon the towers of the Temple as a warning."

She ceased, breathless, for her anger shook her like a storm. A low murmur ran through the hall.

Then Nyleptha answered calmly:

"I would not wish, O sister, to speak as you have spoken. If you make war, I shall make war also; if my hand seems soft, yet will you find it a hand of iron when it seizes your armies by the throat. I do not fear you. I weep for the sorrow which you will bring upon our people and upon yourself. Only yesterday did you try to win my lover from me, whom to-day you call 'a foreign wolf.'" (A great murmur of surprise was heard among the people.) "And last night, you crept into my sleeping place, coming by secret way, and would have foully murdered me, your sister, as I lay asleep. . . ."

"It is a lie!" rang out Agon's voice and twenty others with him.

"It is true," said I, producing the broken blade of the knife and holding it up. "Where is the handle of this knife, O Sorais?"

"It is true," cried Good. "I found the Lady of the Night by the White Queen's bed and on my breast the knife broke."

"Who is on my side?" cried Sorais, shaking her silver spear, for she saw that the feelings of the people were turning against her. "Are you not coming, Bougwan?" she said, addressing Good, who was standing near her. Then, when he made no answer, she turned to the people again:

"War, War, War!" she cried. "Here with my hand upon the Black Stone, which shall last until the Zu-Vendi people set their necks beneath the foot of a foreigner, here I declare war. Who follows Sorais to victory and honour?"

C. Instantly the meeting broke up. Many joined Queen Nyleptha, but some turned from her to Sorais. Amongst these was a young officer of Nyleptha's own guard, who suddenly turned and made a run for the door-way through which Sorais' people were passing. Umslopogaas saw that if this soldier got away others would follow his example, so he seized the man. The officer drew his sword and struck at Umslopogaas. Then the Zulu sprang back with a wild shout; he lifted his axe, and struck the man down dead upon the floor.

This was the first blood of the war.

"Shut the gates," I shouted; but the order came too late.

So, drawing half the people after her, Sorais was soon passing like a storm-wind on her way out of the city.

Now Alphonse had had a quarrel early that morning with Umslopogaas, and he had gone off alone on the road towards the Temple. After wandering about there for a little he started to return, but was met on the way by Sorais and her followers. When she saw Alphonse, Sorais stopped and called to him, and, when he approached, he was instantly seized and carried off.

At first I could not understand why she had done this and then later I discovered her idea. We three—Good, Curtis and I—were much respected by the people of Zu-Vendis. Sorais' cry against the foreigners would please the noblemen and the priests, but not the people. This being so, it was very important to her that she should have one of the strangers with her, so that she might show him to the common people as one of the great strangers who was so sure of the justice of her cause that he had left his companions to follow her flag. Her idea was to dress up Alphonse and to show him as Good. I told Good that I thought this to be her plan.

"What!" he cried, "dress up that little fellow as me!"

Next day the city rang with the feet of soldiers and with all the noise and business of preparing for war.

And Umslopogaas sat in the sunshine, sharpening the edge of his axe.

Twenty-Four

UMSLOPOGAAS SHARPENS HIS AXE

A. One important person did not succeed in getting out of the palace before the gates were shut and that was the High Priest, Agon.

When we knew that Agon was caught, Nyleptha, Sir Henry and I met to decide what should be done with him.

"Put him in prison," said I. But Nyleptha shook her head.

"Well," said Sir Henry, "if we may not put him in prison, I suppose we may as well let him go. He is of no use here."

Nyleptha looked at him in a curious sort of way and said in a dry little voice, "Do you really think so?"

"Eh?" said Curtis. "Yes; I don't see what is the use of keeping him."

She said nothing, but continued to look at him. Then at last he understood. "Forgive me, Nyleptha," he said; "you mean that he shall marry us at once?"

"The priest is there," she said, "and the hall is there. In eight days or less you will leave me and go down to the war, for you must lead my armies. And in war—men sometimes fall."

I went back to our rooms, and in about an hour's time Sir Henry came running over and asked Good, myself, and even Umslopogaas if we would like to come to his marriage. Of course we said "Yes" and off we went to the small temple of the palace, where we found Agon looking very angry. It seemed that he and Nyleptha had been having a difference of opinion about the marriage. He had refused to help or allow any of his priests to do so. Then Nyleptha became very angry and told him that, as Queen, she meant to be obeyed. He still refused.

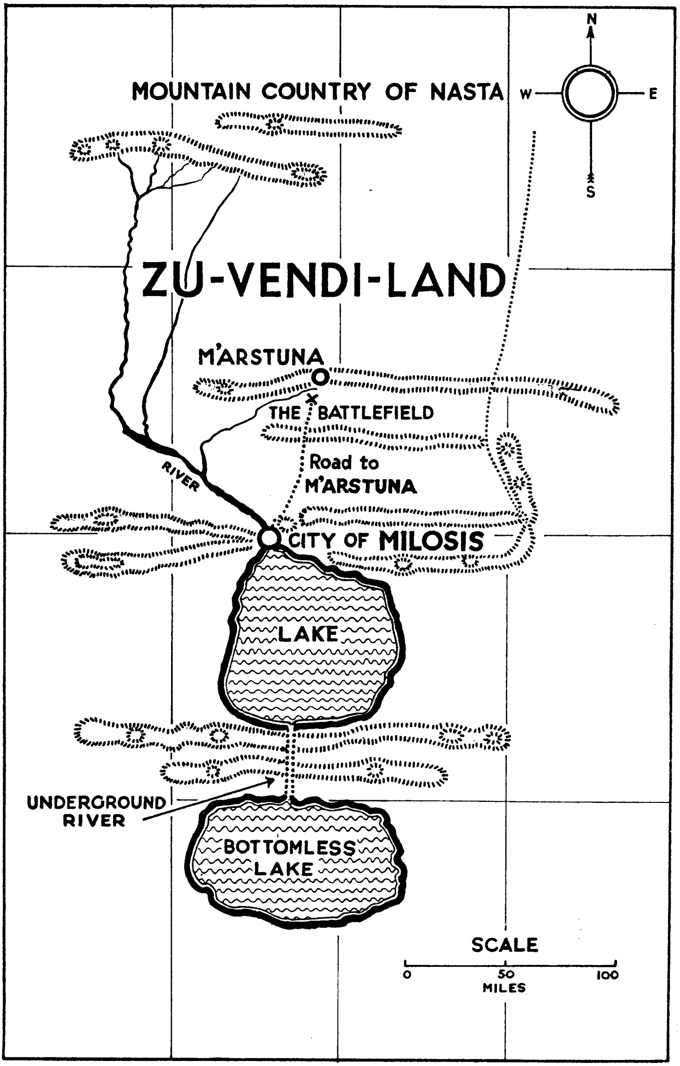
"Well," she said at last, "I cannot cut off the head of a High Priest, and I cannot put him in prison; but I can leave him to watch the altar of the Sun without anything to eat; and, if you will not marry me, O Agon, you shall be placed before the altar in the great Temple until you think differently."

Agon had hurried away that morning without his breakfast and was already very hungry, so he soon changed his mind and said that he would marry them.

B. So, after we had waited a little, in came Queen Nyleptha, looking very happy, dressed in pure white. She took Sir Henry's hand and led him up before the altar. Then Agon, who had been sitting angrily in a corner, came forward and said something into his beard so fast that I could not hear it, but it seemed to be a prayer to the Sun to bless the union. Then he asked each of them if they took each other for husband and wife. Then they kissed each other before the altar, and the service was finished.

That night Good and I dined together, feeling very much as though we had just returned from the funeral of a friend instead of from a marriage.

Next morning work really began. The messages and orders which had been sent off by Nyleptha two days ago now began to take effect, and crowds of armed men came pouring into the city. We saw very little of Nyleptha and of Curtis during the next few days, but Good and I sat daily with the chief officers, drawing up plans of war and arranging a hundred different matters. Men came freely and all day long the great roads leading to Milosis were covered with companies of men arriving from distant places to join Nyleptha. After the first few days, it became clear that we should have an army of about 40,000 foot soldiers and 20,000 horsemen. This was a very big force considering how short was the time which we had to collect it. Remember also that half of the real army of the country had gone over to Sorais.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MOUNTAIN COUNTRY OF NASTA
ZU-VENDI-LAND
M'ARSTUNA
THE BATTLEFIELD
Road to M'ARSTUNA
RIVER
CITY OF MILOSIS
LAKE
UNDERGROUND RIVER
BOTTOMLESS LAKE
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100
MILES

Map of Zu-Vendi-Land

Our force was large, but the reports brought in day by day by our spies showed that the army of Sorais was much larger. She was at a very strong town called M'arstuna, about 120 miles north of Milosis. All the people round were crowding to her flag. Nasta had come down from the north and was on his way to join her with 25,000 of his mountain-dwellers, the most terrible soldiers in the country. Another mighty lord, named Belusha, had come in to Sorais with 12,000 horsemen. Indeed it seemed certain that she would have an army of nearly 100,000 men.

Then came the news that Sorais was intending to leave her camp and march on Milosis, laying waste the country as she came. The question was whether it would be best to meet her at Milosis or to go out and give battle. Good and I both said that we ought to advance against her. If we were to shut ourselves up in the city and wait to be attacked, the people would think we were afraid, and that would turn them against us.

Sir Henry was also of our opinion, and so was Nyleptha. She called for a map of the country. It was brought and spread out before her. About thirty miles south of M'arstuna, where Sorais lay, and ninety miles north of Milosis, the road runs over a neck of land about two and a half miles wide, with hills on each side covered by forest. If this road were blocked, it would be impossible for any army to cross the range of hills. Nyleptha looked at the map; then, with her usual quickness of mind, she laid her finger upon this place, and turning to her husband, said with a proud air of certainty, in which lay no shadow of doubt:

"You shall meet the army of Sorais here. I know the spot and you will drive them before you like dust before the storm."

Sir Henry looked grave and answered nothing.

And outside in the sunshine sat Umslopogaas, sharpening the edge of his axe.

Twenty-Five

THE ORDER OF BATTLE

A. Our great army was gathered on the plain outside the city. To-night it would set out. Good and Umslopogaas were to go with it; Sir Henry and I would follow two days later. On the evening before the army set forth, Queen Nyleptha rode round it and addressed the officers. She spoke to them with such moving words, expressing so complete a faith in their bravery and in the victory which they would win, that she quite carried their hearts away. As she rode round from company to company, the men shouted and cheered her till the ground shook.

Next day they had gone, leaving the city very silent and empty. Indeed there were only about one thousand men left in it—those who from sickness or other cause were unable to march.

Two days later Nyleptha rode with Sir Henry and myself to the city gates. She was mounted on a beautiful white horse called "Daylight" which was supposed to be the fastest and strongest animal in the whole country. Her face bore traces of weeping, but there were no tears in her eyes now. At the gate she stopped and said good-bye to us.

"Good-bye, Macumazahn," she said to me, "remember I trust your wisdom, which is greater than that of any of my people. Your quickness of mind shall save us from Sorais; and I know you will do your duty."

I bowed. Then she turned to Curtis. "Good-bye, my lord; come back with victory and as a king—or else carried dead upon your soldiers' spears."

Sir Henry said nothing; perhaps he could not trust his voice.

"Here," added Nyleptha, "will I greet you when you return after the victory. And now, my lords, once more, good-bye."

We rode on.

When we had gone about a hundred yards, we turned and saw her still sitting on her horse at the same place, looking out after us beneath her hand. About a mile farther on we heard someone following us. We looked round and saw a mounted soldier coming towards us, leading Nyleptha's beautiful horse—Daylight.

"The Queen sends her white horse as a gift to her lord Incubu and orders me to tell my lord that it is the swiftest and strongest horse in all the land," said the soldier.

B. At first Sir Henry did not want to take the horse, saying that it was too good for such work, but I made him do it, thinking that Nyleptha's feelings would be hurt if he did not. Little did I guess at that time what service that noble horse would do for us in our gravest need. It is curious to look back and think on what little accidents great events have depended.

By mid-day we came up with the rear-guard of the great army, and Sir Henry now took over the command.

We marched on without meeting any of the enemy. Indeed we hardly saw anyone, for all the people of the towns and villages along our road had fled, fearing to be caught between the two armies and ground to powder as in a mill.

On the evening of the fourth day, we camped two miles this side of the neck of land of which I have spoken, and our spies brought us word that Sorais with all her army was moving down upon us, and that she had set her camp that night ten miles from the farther side of the neck.

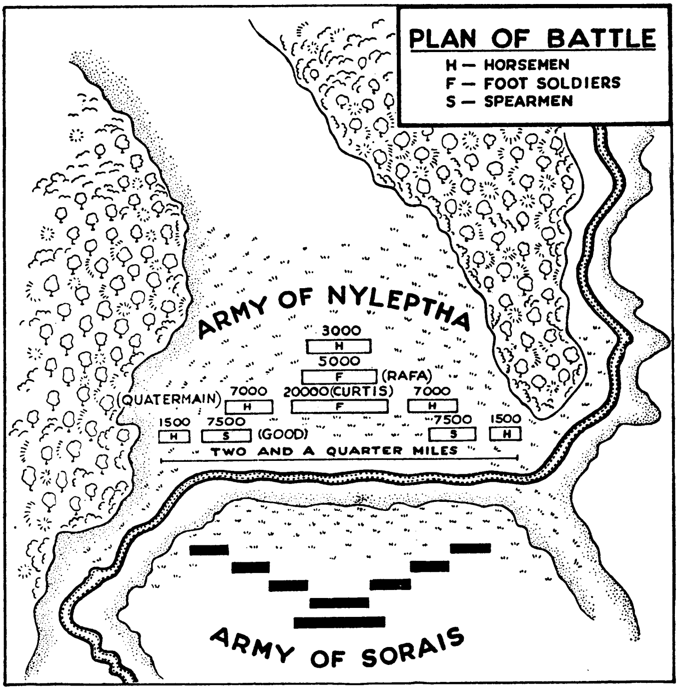
Before dawn we sent forward fifteen hundred horsemen to seize the neck of land. Scarcely had they reached it before they were attacked by about as many of Sorais' horsemen, and a fight took place in which about thirty men were killed. But, when more of our horsemen came up, Sorais' men drew off, taking their dead and wounded with them.

The main body of the army reached the neck about dinner-time, and I must say that Nyleptha's judgement had not failed her. It was an excellent place in which to give battle, especially against a stronger force. The road ran through rocky ground for a mile or so, until it reached the top of a great green wave of land that rolled down a gentle slope to the bank of a little stream and then rolled away again up a still gentler slope to the plain above. The distance from the top of the land-wave to the stream was a little over half a mile.

Sir Henry set out his army that night in the order which they would hold in the battle which would probably take place on the next day. In the centre were 20,000 foot soldiers, armed with spears, swords and shields. These formed the centre of the army. Behind them, in support, were 5,000 more foot soldiers under an excellent officer called Rafa, and behind Rafa were 3,000 horsemen. The rest of the order of battle will be seen from the plan.

Scarcely were we all in our places before Sorais' huge army began to move on the opposite slope. The whole place seemed to be alive with her spear-points and the ground shook with the feet of her companies. It was clear that the spies had been right. There were three of her men to every one of ours.

C. At first we thought that Sorais would attack us at once, for crowds of horsemen moved about at the sides of her army; but she must have changed her mind, for there was no fight that day. I observed that the arrangement of her army was very much the same as that of ours, except that she kept a larger part of her men in support. Opposite our right wing (on the left wing of Sorais' army) was a great company of dark, wild-looking men armed with


PLAN OF BATTLE
H — HORSEMEN
F — FOOT SOLDIERS
S — SPEARMEN
ARMY OF NYLEPTHA
3000
H
5000
F
(RAFA)
(QUATERMAIN)
7000
H
20000 (CURTIS)
F
7000
H
1500
H
7500
S
(GOOD)
7500
S
1500
H
TWO AND A QUARTER MILES
ARMY OF SORAIS

swords and shields only. These were Nasta's 25,000 hillmen.

"My word, Good!" said I, when I saw them, "you will have a hot time to-morrow when those gentlemen charge."

Good looked rather anxious. All day we watched and waited, but nothing happened; and at last night fell. A thousand watch-fires glimmered brightly on the slopes, then faded away one by one like the stars in a night sky. As the hours moved on, silence gathered more deeply over the two great armies.

It was a wearying night. There were endless things to do and to see to; and, more than that, there were our own thoughts and fears. The battle to-morrow would be so huge, the losses of life so terrible! It made me sad to think that these mighty forces were gathered to kill and to destroy only because of the love and hatred of two women. This was the hidden power which was to send those masses of horsemen flashing across the plain; this the power which would roll together those fierce companies of soldiers as clouds in a great thunder-storm. How heavy a load lies upon our rulers; how difficult is the path of their duty!

Deep into the night we sat with white anxious faces and heavy hearts. We talked in whispers, while the guards marched up and down, down and up, and officers came and went like shadows.

And so the time moved on till everything was ready for the coming battle. I lay down and tried to get a little rest; but I could not sleep for fear of to-morrow, for who could say what to-morrow would bring forth? Sorrow and death, that was certain; beyond that we knew not.

And at last up came the red sun, and the huge armies awoke with a great roar and gathered themselves together for battle. It was a beautiful and terrible sight.

Umslopogaas, leaning upon his axe, looked at it with delight.

"Never have I seen anything like it, Macumazahn. Never!" he said. "The battles of my people are as the play of children to what this will be. Do you think they will fight it out to the end?"

"Yes," I answered sadly, "to the death. Be content; to-day you shall have your fill of battle."

Time went on and there was no sign of an attack.

Then a shout of "Sorais!" rose like thunder from the enemy's right. Taking a spy glass I was able to see the Lady of the Night herself riding with her officers along the lines of her army, and, as she went, the mighty thundering shout rolled along before her like the roaring of the ocean. We guessed that this meant the beginning of the battle, and stood ready.

Twenty-Six

THE BATTLE

A. We had not long to wait.

Suddenly, like the smoke from a great gun, out shot two tongue-like companies of horsemen—about 8,000 in all—and came charging down the slope towards the little stream. They came slowly at first, but gathered speed as they went. Before they got to the stream, orders came from Sir Henry; he feared that the shock of such a charge would be too much for his men in the centre and told me to send 5,000 of my horsemen to meet it.

Off went 5,000 men, drawn up in the shape of an arrow-head. I must say that the officer in command led them very well. He started slowly and seemed to be aiming at the tip of the enemy's mass of horsemen. Suddenly he turned off to the right and increased his speed. Before the foe could turn to meet him, the arrow-head struck the enemy about half-way down its length. There was a tearing sound like the breaking up of great sheets of ice. In sank the arrow-head into the heart of the enemy. As it cut its way through, hundreds of horsemen were thrown up on either side of it, as the water is divided in curls in front of an on-rushing ship. In and in! Still further in! By heaven! Right through! Then cheer after cheer rang from our watching thousands. Then back they came again upon the broken ends of the enemy, beating them down, driving them as a wind drives the leaves. There was a rushing of hundreds of riderless horses, the flashing of swords, shouts of the pursuers, and the great force broke into pieces, turned and fled for safety back to its own lines.

The enemy's army, which was now advancing to the attack, opened and swallowed up the flying horsemen. My own forces returned, having suffered only a slight loss.

By this time Nasta's swordsmen were across the little stream and, with dancing flags and flashing swords, were climbing up towards us like ants. Again I received orders to try and stop this movement and to stop also the main advance against the centre of our army. I did the best I could by continuing to send companies of about 1,000 horsemen against them. These companies did the enemy much damage. It was a wonderful sight to see them flash down the hill-side and run themselves like a living knife into the heart of the foe. But after the experience of two or three of these charges, our foes showed more wisdom; for, instead of trying to offer to us an unyielding front, they opened out and let the charge go through, throwing themselves down on the ground and wounding hundreds of horses as they passed by. As a result, we lost many horses and men.

The enemy drew nearer till at last Nasta's men threw themselves upon Good's force of 8,000 spearmen. Good's men were drawn up in three strong squares to receive them.

At about the same time a terrible roar told me that the main battle had begun in the centre and on the left. I raised myself on my horse and looked down to my left. So far as I could see, there was a long glimmering silver line as the sun fell upon falling sword and striking spear. This way and that swung the line of battle in the fearful struggle, now giving way, now gaining a little. But I could not see much of what was happening in the other parts, for I was too busy with what was happening on our own wing.

For the moment the horsemen had come back behind Good's spearmen. Nasta's wild swordsmen were now breaking in red waves upon the rock-like squares. Time after time they shouted their war-cry and threw themselves wildly against the three long lines of spear points, only to be rolled back as waves are thrown back when they meet the cliff. For four long hours the battle continued, almost without a pause. At the end of that time we had gained nothing, and we had lost nothing. Two attempts were made to get round us by forcing a way through the forest which protected our sides; but these attempts had been unsuccessful. As yet Nasta's swordsmen had entirely failed to break Good's three squares, though quite a third of Good's men had fallen.

B. As for the centre, where Sir Henry was with Umslopogaas, it had suffered dreadfully, but it still held its place. And our left still held.

At last the attacks seemed to become weaker. Sorais' army drew back, and I began to think it had had enough—but I was mistaken. Sorais divided her horsemen into small companies and made wild charges with them all along the line. Then once more her tens of thousands of swordsmen and spearmen rolled down upon our weakened squares. Sorais herself led the attack and I saw the sunlight shine upon her golden mail in the front. On they came; our charging horsemen entirely failed to stop their forward rush. Now they had struck us, and our centre bent in like a bow beneath the weight of their attack. It broke!—Then the 8,000 men under Rafa charged down to its support.

We were saved! Our line stood firm again.

Good's three squares were being thrown backwards like boats upon an incoming sea. The front square was burst into and lost half of its men. But the attack was too fierce to last. Suddenly the battle came to a turning point and for a minute or two stood still.

Then a movement began towards Sorais' camp. Just then, too, Nasta's fierce swordsmen drew back—perhaps because they had lost too many men—or perhaps it was a trick. The remains of Good's brave spearmen left the place which they had held for so many hours, cheered wildly, and followed them down the slope. Then the swordsmen turned back suddenly and threw themselves upon their enemies. Taken thus on every side, what remained of the first square was quickly destroyed, and I saw that the second (in which was Good mounted on a grey horse) would soon be broken also. In a few minutes it was broken, and I lost sight of Good.

Then a grey horse burst from the ruins of the square and came rushing past me, riderless. I recognized the horse that Good had been riding. Then I waited no longer, but taking with me half of all my men, I charged straight down upon Nasta's swordsmen. They saw me coming, turned round and gave me a warm greeting. Not an inch would they yield; we cut them down; we cut through them, but they seemed to arise again by hundreds, driving their terrible sharp swords into our horses and cutting into pieces the men who fell to the ground. My horse was killed under me, but fortunately I had a fresh one. My men could hardly see me, and my voice could not be heard. I found myself mixed up with the remains of the square which had formed round its leader and was fighting madly for life. I fell against somebody, and, looking forward, I caught sight of Good's eye-glass; he had been beaten to his knees. Over him stood a great fellow, swinging a heavy sword. Somehow I succeeded in running the man through with the knife I had taken from the Masai; but, as I did so, he gave me a terrible blow on my left side. My mail shirt saved my life, but I felt that I was badly hurt.

I fell on my hands and knees among the dead and dying, and for a minute I turned sick and faint.

C. When I came to my senses again, I saw that Nasta's spearmen were being pursued across the stream and that Good was there by my side, smiling sweetly.

"That was a near thing!" he shouted; "but it is all right now."

Just then we saw the small companies of horsemen on the far right and left flashing out like arrows and falling upon the disordered sides of Sorais' army. That charge decided the battle. In another minute the enemy were retiring across the little stream. There they formed a line again. There came a pause, during which I got my second horse and received orders from Sir Henry to advance. Then, with one fierce deep-throated roar, with the waving of flags and the wide flashing of swords, the remains of our army began to move forward from the places they had so bravely defended all day.

At last it was our turn to attack.

On we moved over the mass of dead and dying. We were approaching the stream, when suddenly I observed a most curious and surprising object. Riding wildly towards us, his arms tightly clasped around his horse's neck against which his white cheek was closely pressed, was a man dressed as one of the leaders of the Zu-Vendi army. As he came nearer, I saw that it was none other than our lost Alphonse. In a minute he was tearing through our lines and had a narrow escape from being killed by our own men. At last someone caught his horse and he was brought to me.

"Ah, sir," he cried in a voice shaking with fear, "thanks to heaven, it is you! Ah, what I have suffered; but you win, sir, you win! They fly; they fly! But listen—no, I forget; it is useless! The Queen is to be murdered tomorrow at dawn in the palace of Milosis. Her guards will leave their places, and the priests are going to kill her. Ah, yes, they did not know that I was hiding underneath a flag in the room, and that I heard it all."

"What!" I cried; "what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. That devil of a Nasta, he went last night to settle the matter with Agon. The guard will leave open the little gate leading from the great stair and go away, and Nasta and the priests will come in and kill her."

"Come with me," I said.

D. I shouted to the second officer to take over the command; then I seized hold of Alphonse's horse and rode off as fast as I could, dragging him along behind me. On we tore, our horses jumping over heaps of dead and dying men—on past the long broken lines of spearmen, to where, mounted on the white horse which Nyleptha had given him, I saw Sir Henry's form towering above the officers round him.

Just as I reached him, the advance began again. A bloody cloth was bound around his head, but I saw that his eye was bright and keen as ever. Beside him was Umslopogaas, his axe red with blood, but he looked quite fresh and unhurt.

"What's the matter, Quatermain?" he shouted.

"Everything; there is a plan to murder the Queen tomorrow at dawn. Alphonse has just escaped from Sorais and he heard it all;"—and I quickly told him what Alphonse had told me. "At dawn, Curtis—and it is now sunset. Dawn is about four o'clock and we are nearly a hundred miles away. Nine hours' riding. What's to be done?"

An idea entered into my head. "Is that horse of yours fresh?" I said.

"Yes, I have only just got on him when my last was killed."

"So is mine. Get off and let Umslopogaas mount. He can ride well. We will be at Milosis before dawn, or, if we are not—well, we cannot help it. No, no; it's impossible for you to leave now. You would be seen and it would turn the fate of the battle. It is not half won yet. The soldiers would think you were running away. Quick now!"

In a moment he was down, and at my orders Umslopogaas sprang into the empty saddle.

" Good-bye," I said. " Send a thousand men after us in an hour if possible."

" You will do your best to save her, Quatermain? " said Curtis in a broken voice.

" I will indeed. Go on; you are being left behind."

He rode off to join the advance, which by this time had crossed the little stream, now running red with the blood of the fallen.

As for Umslopogaas and myself, we left that dreadful field as an arrow leaves a bow, and in a few minutes had passed right out of sight of the fighting and out of the smell of the blood. The noise of battle came only to our ears as a faint far-off roaring, like the sound of distant waves upon the shore.

Twenty-Seven

RIDE! RIDE!

A. At the top of the hill we stopped for a moment to rest our horses. We turned and looked at the battle beneath us. The fierce rays of the sinking sun coloured the whole scene red; we could see the countless flashes of red from swords and spears and yet it seemed like a toy battle, faint and far, for the great hills around and the wide plain beyond made it seem small. So small seem the deeds of us men in the calm eyes of God watching them from the arching sky above.

" We win the day, Macumazahn," said Umslopogaas, taking in the whole battle with one look of his practised eye. " Look, the Lady of the Night's army is giving way on every side; there is no stiffness left in it; it bends like hot iron, and the men are fighting with but half a heart. But I fear the battle will not be finished, for the darkness is gathering and our men will not be able to follow and slay."

He shook his head sadly; then he added, "I do not think that the enemy will fight again. They have had enough. Ah! It is well to have lived to see this. I have seen a fight worth seeing—and I have seen many fights."

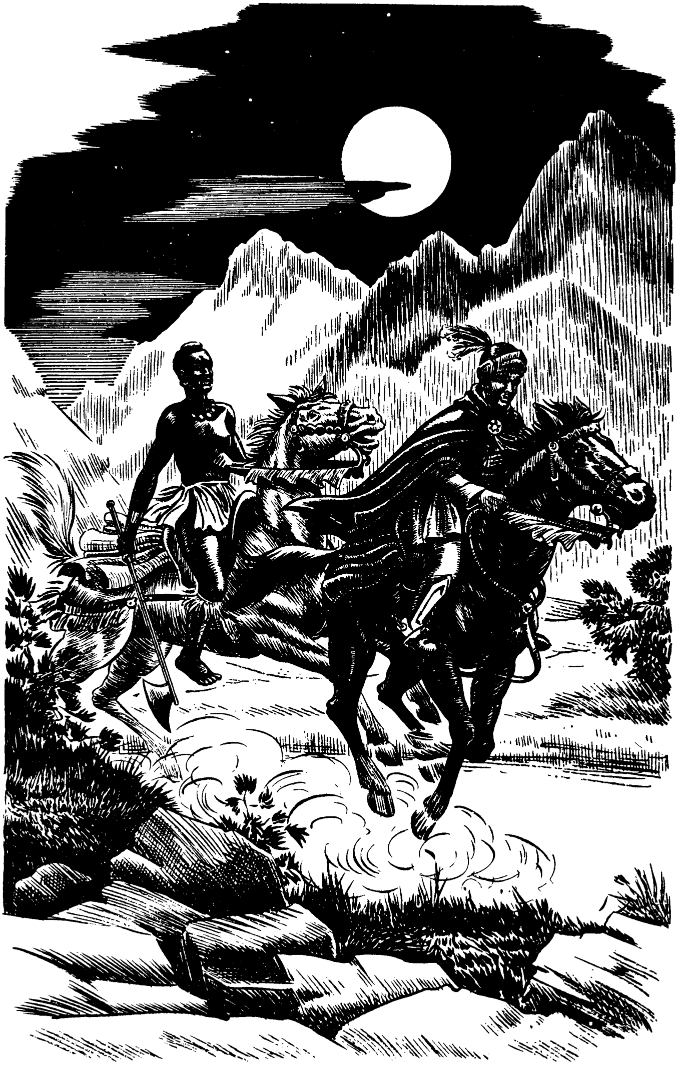
By this time we were on our way again and as we went side by side I told him what we had to do and explained that if we failed, all the lives that had been lost that day, would have been lost uselessly.

"Ah! " he said, "nearly a hundred miles and no horses but these, and we must be there before the dawn. Well—away! away! Man can but try, Macumazahn; and perhaps we shall be there in time to break open that old Agon's head for him. Once he wanted to burn us, did he? And now he would set a trap for my lady Nyleptha, would he? Good! So sure as my name is Umslopogaas, so surely will this axe cut his beard," and he shook the axe as he rode onward.

By now the darkness was closing in, but fortunately there would be a moon later, and the road was good.

On we went through the dim light; the two splendid horses were moving along at a steady speed that neither failed nor changed for mile upon mile. Down the slopes we rode, and across wide valleys that stretched to the foot of far-off hills. Nearer and nearer grew the blue hills. Now we were travelling up their sides and now we were over and passing towards other hills that sprang up in the far, faint distance beyond.

On, never pausing, through the perfect quiet of the night that was set like a song to the falling music of our horses' feet; on, past deserted villages, where only some forgotten dog howled a sad welcome; on, past empty dwellings; on through the white moonlight that lay coldly upon



On through the white moonlight . . .

the wide breast of the earth; on, knee to knee, for hour after hour!

We did not speak, but bent forward on the necks of those two wonderful horses and listened to their deep, long-drawn breaths and the regular ring of their feet.

Solemn and black did Umslopogaas look beside me, mounted upon the great white horse, now and again lifting his fierce face as he gazed along the road and pointed with his axe towards some distant hill.

And so on, still on, without break or pause, for hour after hour. At last I felt that even the splendid animal which I rode was beginning to give out. . . . It was past midnight and we were more than half-way. On the top of a little hill there was a spring: I remembered it because I had slept by it a few nights before. I decided to give the horses and ourselves ten minutes' rest, and signed to Umslopogaas to stop. He did so and we dismounted. That is to say, Umslopogaas dismounted, then helped me off—for my weariness and stiffness and the pain of my wound were such that I could not get down unaided. The horses stood there resting first on one leg and then another.

B. Leaving Umslopogaas to hold the horses, I went to the spring and drank deep. I had had nothing but a mouthful of wine since mid-day, when the battle began, and I was dried up; but I was too tired to feel hungry. I washed my head and hands, then returned, and the Zulu went and drank. Next we allowed the horses to take a few mouthfuls each—no more; and oh, what a struggle we had to get the poor beasts away from the water! There were still two minutes and I employed them in walking up and down and trying to lessen my stiffness, and in seeing the condition of the horses. My beast was clearly very weary; she hung her head and her eye looked sick and dull, but Daylight, Nyleptha's splendid horse, was still wonderfully fresh, though he had far the heavier weight to carry. His eye was bright and clear and he held his head up and gazed out into the darkness around him in a way that seemed to tell us that he knew *he* could cover those forty-five miles that lay between us and Milosis.

Umslopogaas helped me into the saddle, then jumped into his own, and we were off once more.

We passed over another ten miles, and then came a long weary rise of some six or seven miles. Three times my poor horse nearly fell to the ground with me. At the top of the rise she seemed to recover a little and ran down the slope, breathing heavily. We did that three or four miles more swiftly than any since we had started on our wild ride, but I felt that my horse was near the end of its strength; and I was right. Suddenly my horse bolted madly along a stretch of level ground for some three hundred yards, and then pulled herself up and fell right on her head. I rolled clear. As I struggled to my feet, the brave beast raised her head and gave me one sad look; then her head dropped with a moan, and she was dead. I looked at Umslopogaas in despair. There were still more than twenty miles to do before dawn, and how were we to do them with one horse? It seemed hopeless—but I had forgotten the old Zulu's wonderful powers of running. Without a single word, he sprang from the saddle and began to lift me into it.

" But what will you do? " I asked.

" Run," he answered, laying a hand on the back of my saddle. Then off we went again, almost as fast as before.

C. The horse Daylight went along at a fine speed, helping the Zulu who ran behind him holding on. It was a wonderful thing to see old Umslopogaas running mile after mile, his eyes half closed, his lips parted and the breath moving easily between. . . .

Every five miles or so we stopped for a few minutes to let him rest a little. Then on we went again.

" Can you go farther? " I said at the third of these stops, " or shall I leave you to follow me? "

He pointed with his axe to a dim mass before us. It was the Temple of the Sun, now no more than five miles away. " I reach it or I die," he whispered.

Oh, that last five miles! The skin was rubbed from the inside of my legs and every movement of my horse gave me terrible pain. Nor was that all: I was worn out with fighting and lack of food and sleep, and I was also suffering very much from the wound in my left side. Poor Daylight, too, was nearly finished. The air was thick and heavy and mist lay low upon the ground; there was a smell of dawn in the air. On! we must not stay. Better that all three of us should die upon the road than that we should delay, while there was life yet in us.

At last before us were the huge gates of the outer wall of the city. A new and terrible doubt struck me—what if they will not let us in?

" Open! open! " I shouted, at the same time giving the royal pass-word. *" Open! open!* a message about the war! "

" What news? " cried the guard, " and who are you that rides so madly? and who is he whose tongue hangs out, running by your side? "

" It is the lord Macumazahn. Open! open! I bring news."

The great gates rolled back and the bridge came down and we dashed on.

" What news, my lord, what news? " cried the guard.

" The lord Incubu is rolling the army of Sorais back as the wind rolls back a cloud," I answered, and was gone.

On brave horse and yet braver man! Fall not now, Daylight! and hold life in you for fifteen short minutes more, old Zulu fighter! and you shall both live for ever in the history of the land.

Twenty-Eight

TOO LATE?

A. On we go, through the sleeping streets! We have passed the Flower Temple now—one mile more, only one little mile! Hold on, keep your life in you! see the houses run past of themselves. Up, good horse, up, there!—only fifty yards now! Ah, you see home and keep on bravely. Thank God, the palace at last!—but shall I get in there? or is the deed done and the way barred?

Once more I gave the pass-word and shouted, "Open! open!"

No answer, and my heart grew very faint.

Again I called, and this time a single voice replied. To my joy, I recognized it as belonging to Kara, an officer of Nyleptha's guard, a man whom I knew to be as honest as the daylight.

"Is it you, Kara?" I cried. "I am Macumazahn. Bid the guard let down the bridge and throw wide the gates. Quick, quick!"

Then followed a time that seemed to me endless; but at last the bridge fell and one half of the gate opened, and we entered the court-yard. There at last poor Daylight fell down beneath me, as I thought, dead. I struggled free and leant against the wall and looked around.

Except Kara, there was nobody to be seen, and his look was wild, and his garments were all torn. He had opened the gate and let down the bridge alone, and was now getting them up and shut again.

"Where are the guards?" I asked, fearing his answer.

"I do not know," he said. "Two hours ago, as I slept, I was seized and bound, and not until a few moments ago was I able to free myself. I fear that there is evil."

His words gave me fresh strength. Catching him by the arm, I ran, followed by Umslopogaas, through the courtyards and up the great silent hall towards the Queen's sleeping place. We reached the first room—no guards; the second—still no guards. Oh, surely the thing was done! We were too late after all! The silence of those great rooms was dreadful and weighed me down like an evil dream. On, right into Nyleptha's sleeping-room we rushed, sick at heart and fearing the worst. We saw there was a light in it—and someone carrying the light. Oh, thank God, it was the White Queen herself—the Queen unharmed. There she stood in her nightdress, wakened by the noise of our coming, the heaviness of sleep yet in her eyes.

B. "Who is it?" she cried. "What does this mean? Oh, why do you look so wildly? Have you brought me bad news?"

"I left Lord Incubu leading the advance against Sorais last night at sunset. Sorais is beaten back all along her lines and your army is winning the battle."

"I knew it," she cried. "I knew he would win.—'Last night at sunset' did you say?—and it is not yet dawn. Surely . . ."

"Dress quickly, Nyleptha," I broke in, "and give us wine to drink, and call your maidens quickly if you would save yourself alive."

She ran and called through the curtains towards some room beyond; then quickly put on some clothes. Five or six half-dressed women came into the room.

"Follow us and be silent," I said to them, as they gazed at me with wondering eyes. So we went into the first room.

"Now," I said, "give us wine and food, for we are nearly dead."

They brought us wine and cold meat, and Umslopogaas and I drank, and we felt life flow through us again.

"Listen to me, Nyleptha," I said. "Have you here among these waiting-ladies two who have very good sense? Tell them to go out at the side entrance and go to any people in the town who are loyal to you, and pray them to come armed and save you from death. Ask no questions, but do as I say—quickly! Kara will let out the maidens."

She turned and chose two from among them and told them what they had to do and gave them a list of the names of the men to whom each should run.

"Go swiftly and secretly; the Queen's life depends on it," I added.

I had told Kara to come back to us at the door leading from the great court-yard on to the stair-way. Umslopogaas and I made our way to that place, followed by the Queen and her women. As we went, I told her what I knew of the danger around us, and how we had found Kara; how all the guards and men-servants were gone, and she was alone with her women in the palace. She told me that a story had gone through the town that our army had been destroyed and that Sorais was marching on Milosis, and as a result all men had fallen away from her.

It was not yet dawn, nor would be for ten minutes. We were in the court-yard now, and here my wound pained me so much that I had to take Nyleptha's arm. Umslopogaas walked behind us, eating as he went. Now we had crossed the court-yard and had reached the narrow door-way from the palace wall that opened on to the great stair. I looked through and stopped, struck through with terror. The door was gone—entirely gone. It had been torn away and (as we found afterwards) thrown from the stair-way to the ground, two hundred feet below. There in front of us was a narrow space, no bigger than a large table, and ten black steps leading down to the main stair—and that was all.

Twenty-Nine

HOW UMSLOPOGAAS HELD THE STAIR

A. Umslopogaas and I looked at each other.

"You see," I said, "they have taken away the door. Is there anything with which we may fill its place? Speak quickly, for they will be here at daylight."

I asked this because I knew that this was the only place which we could defend; there were no inner doors in the palace, the rooms being separated one from another by curtains. I knew also that if we could defend this place, the murderers could not get in anywhere else; for the secret door used by Sorais had since been blocked up, and there was no other door.

"Listen," said Nyleptha, "on the farther side of the court-yard there are some large pieces of stone which the workmen left here ready for repairing the wall. Let us block the door with those."

This was an excellent idea. Before beginning work, I sent one of the Queen's maidens down the great stair to see if she could get help from the houses below: her father was a great merchant employing many men, and he lived near the foot of the stair. I then sent another to keep watch through the doorway.

We then walked across the court-yard to where the stone lay. Here we met Kara returning from having sent off the first two women. The stones were large, broad and heavy—about six inches thick. Without delay we set all the women to carry them down to the door; each woman took one end of a stone.

"Listen, Macumazahn," said Umslopogaas, "if these fellows come, it is I who will hold the stair against them until the door is built. . . . No, don't forbid me; it will be a man's death. I was told by one long dead that this would be my end. It has been a good day; now let it be good night. See, I throw myself down to rest yonder. When their footsteps are heard, wake me up—but not before; for now I am tired." And without a word, he went outside and threw himself down on the stone floor and was instantly asleep.

At this time I too was done for; I was forced to sit down by the door-way and content myself with giving orders. The girls brought the stones, while Kara and Nyleptha built them up across the door-way, which was six feet wide. The wall was built three stones deep, for less would be useless. The girls laboured wonderfully, but it was slow work, dreadfully slow.

B. The light was growing now.

Suddenly in the silence we heard at the far-off bottom of the stair the faint sound of armed men. As yet the wall was only two feet high.

So they had come. Alphonse was right.

The sound came nearer, and in the grey of the dawn we could see long lines of men, about fifty in all, slowly creeping up the stair. Now they were half-way up. At this point they saw that something was happening above them, and they waited for three or four minutes before coming on again. This was very fortunate for us.

The wall was now almost three feet high.

I woke Umslopogaas. The great man rose, stretched himself, and swung his axe round his head. "It is well," he said. "I feel young again. My strength has come back to me—it has come back as a lamp burns up before it dies. Fear not, I shall fight a good fight. The wine and the sleep have put a new heart into me." Then he turned to me and took my hand:

"Let there be no funeral, but let them put me in the ground according to the custom of my people, sitting with my eyes towards Zululand." Then he turned to face the advancing foe.

Just then to my surprise the Zu-Vendi officer, Kara, climbed over our wall in his quiet determined sort of way, and took his place by the Zulu, drawing his sword as he did so.

"What, are you coming?" laughed Umslopogaas. "Welcome—a welcome to you, brave heart. Hurrah! Hurrah for a man who can die like a man! We are ready; we are hungry to fight. Who comes to give greeting to my axe? Who will taste its kiss? I am the Slayer; I am the Swift-footed; I am Umslopogaas, Holder of the Axe, of the people of Amazulu. I am Umslopogaas, son of the King of Makedama, of the royal people of Chaka. I am the Conqueror of the Unconquered, the Ringed Man, the Wolf-man. I call to them! I love death! I await them!"

As he said—or rather sang—his wild war song, the armed men came up the stair with a rush. Among them I saw Nasta and Agon. One big fellow, armed with a heavy spear, dashed up the ten steps leading to our doorway ahead of the others. He struck at the great Zulu with the spear: Umslopogaas moved his body so that the blow missed him, and the next instant his axe cut through hair and head, and the man's body fell down the steps. As he dropped, his round shield fell from his hand, and the Zulu bent down and seized it, still singing as he did so.

In another moment Kara had also slain a man. And then began the most wonderful fight I have ever seen in my life.

C. Up rushed the attackers, one, two, three at a time; and, as fast as they came, the axe swung and the sword cut, and down they rolled again, dead or dying.

And ever as the fight grew fiercer, the old Zulu's eyes seemed to get quicker and his arm stronger. He shouted out his war-cry and the names of the chiefs whom he had slain, and the blows of his axe rained straight and true, cutting through everything they fell upon. He struck each time with his full strength and at every stroke a man sank in his tracks and went rolling down the steps.

The foes cut at him with swords and struck at him with spears, wounding him in twenty places till he ran red with blood; but the shield protected his head and a mail shirt guarded his body—and for minute after minute, aided by the brave Kara, he still held the stair. At last Kara's sword broke; he struggled with a foe hand to hand; they rolled down together, and he was cut to pieces, and died like the brave man he was. Umslopogaas took no notice, nor even turned his head. "Galazi! Oh, that you were here, my brother, Galazi," he cried, and beat down a foe—and another—and another, till at last they drew back from the steps and gazed at him in wonder, thinking he was more than human.

The wall was now over four feet high, and hope rose in my heart as I leant there against it, helpless, and watched that splendid struggle in which I could give no aid.

And Umslopogaas, he leant too on his good axe; and, though he was faint with wounds, he laughed at them and called them "women"—the grand old fighter standing there one amongst so many! None would come against him, though Nasta called at them and shouted to them to go.

At last Agon came. He was a brave man, and he was mad with anger, for he saw that the wall would soon be built and all his plans ruined. He shook a great spear in his hand and rushed up the steps.

"Ah, ah!" shouted the Zulu, as he recognized the priest's flowing beard, "it is the old wizard. Come on! I am waiting for you. Come on! I have promised to slay you, and I always keep my promises!"

D. On came Agon and drove a big spear at Umslopogaas with such force that it went right through the shield and wounded him in the neck. The Zulu cast down the shield, and that moment was Agon's last. Before he could free his spear from the shield and strike again, Umslopogaas seized his axe with both hands, swung it high, and drove it right on to Agon's head; and he rolled down dead among the bodies of his fellow-murderers.

Even as Agon fell, a great cry rose from the foot of the stair. Looking out through the part of the door-way that was not yet closed we saw armed men rushing up to our aid, and we called an answer to their shouts. Then the murderers who yet remained on the stair-way turned to fly, but having no way to go, they were cut down as they fled. Only one man stayed, and he was the great Lord Nasta. For a moment he stood, with bowed head, leaning on his long sword as though in despair. Then, with a dreadful shout, he rushed up at the Zulu. He swung the sword around his head and dealt him such a mighty blow that the keen edge of the heavy blade bit right through the mail shirt and cut deep into Umslopogaas's side, causing him to drop his axe. Raising the sword Nasta sprang forward to make an end of him, but he little knew his foe. With a shake and a great cry of anger the Zulu gathered himself together and sprang straight at Nasta's throat, as I have sometimes seen a wounded lion spring. He struck Nasta full, just as his foot was on the top step. His long arms closed around him like iron bands, and they rolled together struggling madly. Nasta was a strong man and wild with despair, but he could not equal the strongest man in Zululand, not even wounded as he was. In a minute the end came. I saw Umslopogaas rise to his feet: I saw him swing up the struggling Nasta in one gigantic swing, and with a shout of victory throw him straight over the side of the bridge to be broken on the rocks two hundred feet below.

Thirty

FULFILMENT

A. We heard loud shouts from the outer gates; the people from the town had come. Two of Nyleptha's maidens went off to let them in, and the others pulled down the wall which they had built. Then from the door-way, followed by a crowd of our friends, came Umslopogaas—a dreadful and a splendid figure. The man was a mass of wounds, and one look at his wild eye told me that he was dying. The ring upon his head was cut through in two places by sword cuts. On the right side of his neck was the spear wound of Agon and on his right side the mail shirt had been cut through by Nasta's sword.

On he went axe in hand that dreadful-looking, splendid man, and the ladies forgot to turn faint at the scene of blood, and cheered him; but he did not stay or notice them. With outstretched arms and almost blinded eyes, he passed on, followed by us all—through the court-yard—past the place where the stones lay—through the round arch and the thick curtains—and into the great hall which was now filling with hastily armed men. Straight up the hall he went, leaving behind him a track of blood, until at last he reached the Great Black Stone, which stood in the centre of it. Here his strength seemed to fail him, for he stopped and leant upon his axe.

Then suddenly he lifted up his voice and cried aloud:

"I die, I die—but it was a kingly fight! Where are those who came up the great stair? I see them not. Are you there, Macumazahn, or have you gone before me to wait for me in the darkness whither I go? The blood blinds me—the place turns round. I hear the voice of waters; Galazi calls me! "

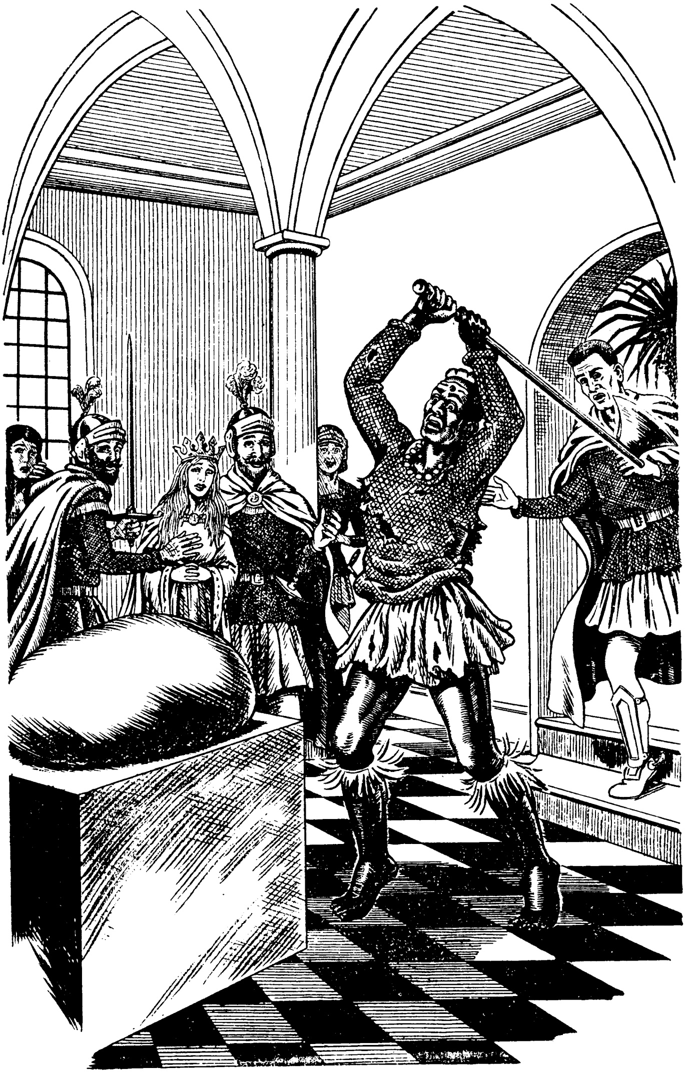
Then a new thought seemed to strike him; he lifted the red axe and kissed the blade.

" Farewell, my axe," he cried. " No, we will go together; we cannot part, you and I: we have lived too long one with another, you and I. No other man shall hold you. One stroke more; only one! A good stroke! a straight stroke! a strong stroke! "

B. Umslopogaas drew himself to his full height and seized his axe in both hands. He gave a wild heart-shaking shout, and began to swing the axe round his head till it looked like a circle of flame. Then suddenly, with terrible force, he brought it down straight on to the top of the stone. A shower of fire flew up; and such was the strength of the blow that the great stone burst open and fell in a hundred pieces, while of the axe there remained but a few bits of iron and the horn which had been the handle. Down to the floor fell pieces of the great stone and down on them, still holding the end of his axe, fell the brave Zulu—dead. A cry of wonder and of fear rose from all who had seen this sight.

Then somebody whispered the old saying: " He has broken the stone! " And a murmuring arose.

" Yes," said Nyleptha, " O my people, he has broken the stone, and the old saying is fulfilled—for a stranger king rules in our land. My lord Incubu has beaten Sorais back, and he shall be your king." She turned to me and laid her hand on my shoulder. " And this man," she said, " though he was wounded in the fight yesterday, he rode with the Zulu who lies there—rode one hundred miles between sunset and sunrise to protect me against those cruel men. Their deeds are deeds of glory, such as our history cannot show the like. And because of the deeds that they have done the name of Macumazahn and the name of the dead Umslopogaas and the name of Kara, my servant, who



Umslopogaas seized his axe in both hands helped hold the stair, shall be written in letters of gold above my throne and shall stand in honour there for ever. The Queen has said it." . . .

The next thing I remember was the sound of horsemen outside the palace wall, some ten hours later. I raised myself from my bed and asked what was the news. They told me that a large body of horsemen, sent by Curtis, had arrived from the scene of the battle. When they left, the wreck of Sorais' army was being pursued towards M'arstuna. The victory was complete.

Having heard this, I felt that I could die with a light heart. And then everything became black. . . .

Thirty-One

THE END

A. It is a week since I wrote the above. And now I take up my pen for the last time, for I know that the end is near. My mind is still clear and I can write, but with great difficulty. The pain has been very bad during the last week, but now it has left me, and it is being followed by a deadness and lack of feeling in my limbs of which I cannot mistake the meaning. And, just as the pain has gone, so with it all fear of my end has disappeared. I feel only as though I were about to sink into the arms of a wonderful rest, as a child lays itself to sleep in the arms of its mother.

So this is the end of it—a few troubled restless years of life, and then the arms of that great Angel Death.

I am glad to have lived, glad to have known the dearness of a woman's love and that true friendship which is greater even than the love of woman, glad to have heard the laughter of little children, to have seen the sun and the moon and the stars, to have felt the kiss of the salt sea on my face and to have watched the wild beasts of the forest move down to the water in the moonlight.

I feel a great change coming over me. The darkness draws near and the light disappears. And yet it seems to me that through that darkness I can already see a shining welcome on many a long-lost face.

The sinking sun is turning the golden roof of the temple to flame. My fingers are tired.

So to all who have known me, to all who can think one kindly thought of the old hunter, I stretch out my hand from this far-off shore and bid them a long good-bye.

" I have spoken," as the Zulus say.

Note by Sir Henry Curtis

B. A year has passed since our dear friend, Allan Quatermain, wrote those last words " I have spoken."

There is much to tell about what has happened in that year—and yet I cannot tell it. I should tell how Queen Sorais killed herself rather than remain a prisoner; I should tell how I myself was crowned king in the great Flower Temple with my dear wife standing by my side. But I feel the loss of my two dearest friends too keenly to be able as yet to look backward into the past in which they died.

If the hand of art and the beauty of stone can print a man's name on the memory of a nation, their names will be ever remembered. Their figures stand for ever in the great hall of the palace—and serve each time I see them to freshen the memory of my loss.

Good is still with us, busy with his work as Master Shipbuilder of our country. Alphonse is returning to France—and to his dear Annette: he feels that the story of his great " deeds of war " in this country and the letter which

I have given him may gain him pardon, even from the French Government (if indeed that Government remembers him at all). I send these papers by his hand.

I ask my brother, George Curtis, to make public this history, so that the noble deeds and fate of these, my two friends, may be known.

Henry Curtis

QUESTIONS

Q.—Allan Quatermain. C.—Henry Curtis. G.—Good.
U.—Umslopogaas. A.—Alphonse. N.—Nyleptha. S.—Sorais.

1. A. 1. Why is Q. sad?
2. What people come to see him?
3. " Good is willing " —willing to do what?

1. B. 1 What was G.'s reason for going?
2. " For years I have heard stories of——" —of what?
3. How soon will they start on the journey?

2. A. 1 Who told them to start from the Tana River?
2. What does Q. remember best about Lamu?
3 Who is Mr. Mackenzie?

2. B. 1. Mr. Swayne said, " I must warn you——" —of what?
2. Who brought the Wakwafi soldiers to Lamu?

2. C. 1. Who is Macumazahn?
2. What weapon did Umslopogaas use?
3. What made the Wakwafi decide to go with Q.?

3. A. 1. What interesting place did they visit on the journey?
2. What did the head-man at Charra say he would do?
3. How did they travel on from Charra?

3. B. 1. What made their labour less?
2. Whom did they see on a hill?
3. What did C. ask?

4. A. 1. Where did they spend the night?
2. What came down to the water to drink? (*a*) many animals; (*b*)—?—; (*c*)—?—
3. What did Q. hear?

4. B. 1. Whom did the Masai kill?
2. What did Q. cut off?
3. Why was the boat floating in to the bank?

5. A. 1. What did Q. keep?
2. Where did they spend the night?
3. "There was only one comfort to us" —what?

5. B. 1. What did they see at 11 o'clock?
2. On what was the house built?
3. What persons did Good see coming to meet them?

6. A. 1. What was there round the house?
2. What was in the middle of the garden?
3. How far could Mr. M. see from his "watch-tower"?

6. B. 1. What work did Alphonse do?
2. Of whom was A. frightened?
3. Why did A. leave Zanzibar?
4. What did Mr. M. show to Q.?

6. C. 1. Why was the man driven out of his village?
2. "He was taken to a place where all the —(*a*)— were —(*b*)— and lived in —(*c*)—."
3. Why would not the woman allow him in the house?
4. What killed the man?

7. A. 1. What were Mr. and Mrs. M. thinking of doing?
2. On what will Q., C. and G. carry their things?
3. What did A. want to do?

7. B. 1. What killed one Wakwafi?
2. Whose bite is "death to all animals"?
3. What did the natives say was at the top of the mountain?

7. C. 1. What killed the donkeys?
2. What did Q. buy?
3. What meat did they take?

8. A. 1. "Good wondered at it and could not explain it" —what?
2. What creatures did they see on the lake?
3. (*a*) Who told Q. about the "white people"?
(*b*) Who had told this person about them?

8. B. 1. How many birds did C. kill?
2. What did the Wakwafi cry out?
3. "At the same moment we felt our boat——" —what happened?

8. C. 1. What did Q. shout?
2. What two sounds did Q. hear? (*a*), (*b*).

9. A. When Q. lit the lamp—(1) What was G. doing? (2) What was C. doing? (3) What was U. doing?

9. B. 1. "Good was less hopeful" —what did he say?
2. Who first kept watch at the front?
3. Who first sat at the back?

10. A. 1. What did Q. notice?
2. Why did Q. take his hand out of the water?
3. How high was the flame?
4. What did C. shout?
5. Who was the last of the five to fall senseless?

11. A. 1. What had happened to Q.'s hand?
2. What had happened to the boat?
3. Between what was the river running?
4. How wide was the beach?

11. B. 1. Why did U. say that "devils are fools"?
2. What did they rub on their hands?

11. C. 1. How big was the crab?
2. What did a crab do (*a*) to Good? (*b*) to Alphonse?
3. Q: "I felt almost ready to agree with him [Umslopogaas]." What had U. said?

11. D. 1. What happened at midnight?
2. Through what did the boat pass at three o'clock?

12. A. 1. Where was the boat?
2. What was floating in the water?
3. What did U. say about this thing when it sank?

12. B. 1. What showed them the direction of the shore?
2. What showed them they were near a river?
3. How many people were in the other boat?

12. C. 1. Of what colour were the man's clothes?
2. Who else was in the boat with the man?
3. "The question is," said C., "how——" —what?

12. D. 1. What clothes did G. put on?
2. U. to G: "I always thought that you were —(*a*)— but now you are like —(*b*)—"

13. A. 1. What foolish thing did G. do?
2. Who saved the girl?
3. Who was in the big rowing-boat?
4 What was the name of (*a*) the city, (*b*) the country?

14. A. 1. What was the building on the top of the cliff?
2. What was the building on the top of the hill one and a half miles farther off?
3. What was the "glory of Milosis"?

14. B. 1. How long had Rademas to complete the stair?
2. Who told him how to do it?
3. What did Rademas become?
4. What did he make in memory of his success?

14. C. 1. Where did they go first after leaving the boat?
2. On to what did the right and left doors open?

14. D. 1. What did Q. notice about the soldier's sword?
2. What will happen when the Black Stone is broken?
3. Who was the old man with the gold cap?
4. Who were Sorais and Nyleptha?

15. A. 1. Was Nyleptha dark or fair?
2. Why did Q. say, "Now we may expect trouble"?

15. B. 1. What part of the officer's speech made the priests angry?
2. What did Agon demand?
3. Why did not Nasta support Nyleptha?

15. C. 1. Which of Nyleptha's pictures filled Q. with fear?
2. What did her next picture mean?

16. A. 1. How wide was the road?
2. Who went in the first carriage?
3. (*a*) What did Alphonse ask? (*b*) What did Q. answer?

16. B. 1. When do the leaves of the altar open?
2. Which part of the floor is made of brass?
3. Where did Q., C. and G. stand?

17. A. 1. What sign did N. give to Q.?
2. What was Agon doing?

17. B. 1. What did Agon do when he bent forward?
2. What did the floor do?
3. What was under the altar?
4. Who saved Alphonse?

17. C. 1. What did Q. do to the priest?
2. Where did the priest fall?
3. What did the soldiers do?
4. " This was a new idea " —what was?

17. D. 1. " And if I refuse, O Queen? " —what was the answer?
2. N: " Let the matter wait till——" —till when?

18. A. 1. Who were the six men?
2. Where did they usually go for supper?
3. Who are always the " most simple and kindly "?

18. B. 1. Sorais appeared —(*a*)— to Good, but to Quatermain she appeared —(*b*)—.
2. What was the second danger?
3. What will Nasta ask at the next meeting of the Court?

18. C. 1. What must C. ask N. to do?
2. What did Q. ask S. to do?

18. D. 1. Who (in the song) is the " only victor "?
2. In what way are queens not like other people?

19. A. 1. " The sound of our footsteps whispered up in the roof like——" —what?
2. N: " You asked me to come here; no doubt it is about——" —what?

19. B. 1. " N.'s face was like the face of——" —what?
2. What does Umslopogaas think C. ought to do?
3. C: " What are you thinking about? " What did Q. answer?

20. A. 1. What did Nasta do when he heard the last law?
2. Why would the marriage be good for the kingdom?

20. B. 1. What second favour did Nasta ask?
2. What did this speech of Nasta's mean?

21. A. 1. What did Sorais offer to Curtis?
2. Why did Sorais look at the table?

21. B. 1. To whom did Sorais send messages? (*a*), (*b*).

21. C. 1. N: " It is a lie " —what is?
2. What order did N. give to the officer?

21. D. 1. Where had Sorais gone?
2. Where was Good at eight o'clock?
3. What did C. tell U. to do?

22. A. 1. Who came to N.'s room?
2. On what did the knife break?
3. How did the person disappear?

23. A. 1. What bad name did S. call C.?
2. What did N. put on C.'s neck?
3. " All the world loves——" —what?

23. B 1. What did S. shake?
2. What does Sorais say she will do to N.?
3. (*a*) Whom did S. ask to come with her? (*b*) Did he go?

23. C. 1. Whom did U. kill?
2. Why had A. gone off alone?
3. What will S. do with A.? " . . . him up and show him as . . ."

24. A. 1. Who did not get out of the palace?
2. What did N. say she would do to Agon?
3. What is Agon to do?

24. B. 1. What army will N. have?
2. What army will S. have?
3. Where will the armies meet? "On a —— of land —— miles north of Milosis."

25. A. 1. What was the name of N.'s horse?
2. N. to C: "Come back with —(*a*)— or on —(*b*)—."
3. What did the soldier bring to C.?

25. B. 1. When did the main body of the army reach the "neck"?
2. How many men had S. for every one of N.'s?

25. C. 1. Opposite which wing of N.'s army were Nasta's men placed?
2. What did U. ask Q.?
3. What did Q. see through the spy-glass?

26. A. 1. In what shape were Q.'s horsemen drawn up for the charge?
2. "After some experience of these charges, our foes showed more wisdom" —how? (What did they do?)
3. How were G.'s men drawn up?

26. B. 1. Who supported the centre when it broke?
2. What colour was G.'s horse?
3. Where was Q. wounded? (In what part of the body?)

26. C. 1. What was the "curious sight"?
2. What is to happen "to-morrow at dawn"?
3. Where was A. hiding when he heard this (2)?

26. D. 1. What horse did Q. take?
2. Who rode with him?
3. (*a*) How far must he ride? (*b*)—in how many hours?
4. What did Q. tell C. to send after him?

27. A. 1. "So small seem the deeds of men in——" (finish this).
2. What does U. promise to cut?
3. How far had they gone at midnight?
4. Where did they stop?

27. B. 1. What happened to Q.'s horse?
2. What horse will Q. ride?
3. What will U. do?

27. C. 1. " Can you go farther? " How did U. answer?
2 " A new and terrible doubt struck me " —what?
3. For how many minutes more must they ride?

28. A. 1. Who was Kara?
2. What had the guard done to Kara?
2. How was N. dressed?

28. B. 1. What were the two ladies sent to do?
2. How soon would it be dawn?
3. What had been done to the door?

29. A. 1. With what will they block the door?
2. What was the father of the lady sent down the stair?
3. Who will hold the stair while the wall is being built?

29. B. 1. How high is the wall now?
2. How many enemies were there?
3. Who went to help U.?
4. From where did U. get a shield?

29. C. 1. Why did Kara get killed?
2. How high is the wall now?
3. Who came against U. at last?

29. D. 1. Where did Agon wound U.?
2. Where did Nasta wound U.?
3. What did U. do to Nasta?

30. A. 1. At what place did U. stop?
2. From what will not U. be parted?
3. What will U. do?

30. B. 1. What happened to the stone?
2. Where shall the names of Q. and U. be written?
3. What sound did Q. hear?

31. A. 1. What does Q. know?
2. "Already through the darkness I see——" —what?
3. Write from memory the last three or four lines from "So to all who . . ." down to ". . . as the Zulus say."

31. B. 1. What happened to Sorais?
2. What happened to Curtis?
3. What happened to Good?
4. Who brought this book to France and posted it to England?

PRONUNCIATION OF THE CHIEF NAMES OF PERSONS AND PLACES

THE pronunciation given in brackets is the system used in *The New Method Dictionary* followed by the pronunciation in The International Phonetic Symbols.

Aden	(21·9)	ˈeidən
Agon	(21·5)	eigɔn
Albert Nyanza	(3·9–413·9)	ælbət naiˈænzə
Allan Quatermain	(3·9–55·9·21)	ˈælən ‘kwɔɔtəmein
Alphonse	(3 5)	ˈælfɔnz
Baringo	(3 1·67)	bæˈriŋgou
Belusha	(2·7·9)	beˈluʃə
Bougwan	(77·44)	ˈbuugwaan
Chaka	(4·4)	ˈtʃaka
Charra	(3·4)	ˈtʃæra
Curtis	(99·1)	ˈkəətis
Durand	(17 3)	diuˈrænd
Elgumi	(2·77·1)	elˈguumi
Incubu	(1·7·7)	inˈkubu
Jutson	(8·9)	ˈdʒʌtsən
Jara	(4·4)	ˈdʒara
Kenya	(11·19)	ˈkiiniə
Keshla	(2·9)	ˈkeʃlə
Kukuanaland	(7·7·44·9·3)	kukuˈaanəlænd
(Lake) Lago	(44·67)	ˈlaagou
Lamu	(44·7)	ˈlaamu
Lekakisera	(2·4·11·2·9)	ˈlekaˈkiiserə
Mackenzie	(9·2·1)	məˈkenzi
Macumazahn	(3·7·4·4)	ˈmækuˈmazan
Makedama	(4·2·4·4)	ˈmakeˈdama
M'arstuna	(4·77·4)	masˈtuna
Masai	(4·41)	maˈsaɪ
Milosis	(41·67·1)	maiˈlousis
Mombasa	(5·4·9)	mɔmˈbasə
Naples	(21)	ˈneɪplz
Nasta	(4·4)	ˈnasta
Nylephtha	(1·2·9)	niˈlefθə
Rademas	(3·1·3)	ˈrædimæs
Rafa	(4·4)	ˈrafa
Rider Haggard	(41·9–3·9)	ˈraidə ˈhægəd
Rudolf	(77·5)	ˈruudɔlf
Sheba	(11·9)	ʃiibə
Sorais	(5·21·1)	sɔrei.is
Swayne	(21)	swein
Tana (River)	(4·4)	ˈtana
Tsetse (fly)	(2·1)	ˈtetsi
Umslopogaas	(7·5·9·44)	umˈslɔpəgaas
Vesuvius	(1·77·19)	viˈsuuviəs
Victoria Nyanza	(1·55·19–413·9)	vikˈtɔɔriə naiˈænzə
Wakwafi	(4·4·1)	ˈwakˈwafi
Zanzibar	(3·1·44)	ˈzænziˈbaa
Zulu	(77·7)	ˈzuulu
Zu-Vendis	(7·2·1)	zuˈvendiz

NEW METHOD SUPPLEMENTARY READERS

A series of graded readers in seven stages

Titles in Stage 5

Allan Quatermain
David Copperfield
King Solomon's Mines
The Black Arrow
Treasure Island
Typee
Some Travels of Livingstone
A Message from Mars
Vice Versa
Return to Treasure Island
Emma
The Rosary
Thelma
Singing Wind and other stories
Great Men and Women
A Christmas Carol

Titles in Stage 6

Ivanhoe
Silas Marner
The Time Machine
Morning Star

Titles in Stage 7

The Mill on the Floss
The Mystery of Edwin Drood

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